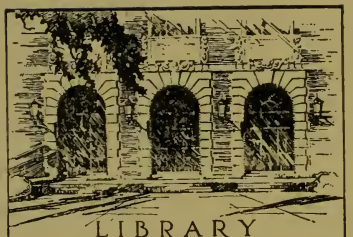

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"CHERRY RIPE!"

A Romance.

BY THE AUTHOR OF

"COMIN' THRO' THE RYE," "THE TOKEN OF THE SILVER LILY."

"Could ye come back to me, Douglas, Douglas,
In the old likeness that I knew,
I could be so loving, so tender and true,
Douglas, Douglas, tender and true."

IN THREE VOLUMES.
VOL. III.

Third Edition.

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"CHERRY RIPE!"

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BOOK II.—*Continued.*

CHAPTER XVI.

"One torment spared
Would give a pang to jealous misery
Worse than the torment's self."

"IF I had only known what it was going to be," said Flora, wiping her eyes with indignant energy, "I never, *never* would have married, *much less* have had a family!"

"There, there," said Colin, putting his arm round her, "don't cry, Florry; you won't be here for long, you know," and he essayed to stem the torrents of tears that

drenched, but could not dim, his wife's blooming cheeks.

Beauty in distress, provided she manages that same distress becomingly, always moves the heart of man, and shall we lower brave, honest Colin in the reader's eyes if we admit that Flora's comeliness of person influenced him to a degree of which he himself was scarcely aware, and that caused him to display towards her a leniency that had she been a plain woman he never would have done?

From the highest rank to the lowest, beauty has privileges accorded to it for which ugliness sighs in vain; and it is notorious that among the lower orders, it is rarely found that a man ill-uses his mate if she is handsome.

"I ought not to have to stay here at all," said Flora crossly; "indeed I consider it perfectly ridiculous that I am not going to Glen-luce with you to-day. Taffy and Colin could easily have come, and Mignon would have taken care of Floss—the child cares to have nobody else with her, so that so far

as I can see, my remaining here is not of the smallest use to anybody!"

"Then it ought to be," said Colin gravely as he took his arm away from his wife's shoulders. "It is time we started," he added, turning to Adam, who just then made his appearance; "but where is Mignon?"

"It is early yet," said Adam indifferently, "and I would not have her disturbed."

"How considerate of you!" said Flora ironically; "nevertheless, is not that Mignon herself yonder?"

They were standing close to the gate outside which the carriage waited, and at that moment there came quickly through the adjoining one, a little figure in white, that at sight of Flora and Colin shrank back as though dismayed. Recovering herself, however, Mignon came slowly forward, a little out of breath with running, her colour changing from red to white, from white to red again, her eyes downcast, full of a proud and wistful trouble too deep for tears. She had thought to find Adam alone, she did not know even whether his great dislike for her

would permit him to say one word of farewell, and perhaps he would shame her before his people; but be that as it might, her gentle heart forbade the thought that he should depart without a God-speed from her . . . . he had been her friend once, her benefactor always, and however cruel he might be now, she could never forget that.

"You are only just in time," said Flora, taking out her watch and looking at it. "You have ten minutes" (to Colin) "in which to catch your train. Good-bye!"

And she held up her cheek to be kissed. But Colin was not attending to her; he was looking at Mignon.

"Perhaps you'll change your mind," he said kindly, "and come over with Flora and the children, though indeed it is a very great pity that you are not coming with us to-day——"

"It is rather too late to recommence that old argument," said Flora serenely; "meanwhile don't blame *me* if you arrive at one end of the platform just in time to see your train whisking out at the other!"

"Well, good-bye, Mignon," said Colin, giving her hand an affectionate squeeze, and then—and then—it was Adam's turn to wish her farewell, and for one miserable moment it seemed to her that he meant to go away, in disgust with her, without one word.

But no—all at once she found her slender hand in his, and was it by chance or of a purpose, that in that hand there lay a tiny knot of flowers no bigger than a shilling, of which the meanings were all kind and gentle, for she had learned their language, and understood it? His own hand closed so amply over both that neither of the onlookers could have told of the poor little peace-offering hazarded and accepted; then, the hand-clasp over, Adam stood alone. "Good-bye, Mignon," he said.

Her lips moved as though in response, but uttered no sound; she was indeed on the verge of wild words and weeping, but this he could not know as at last he turned away, and with a word or two to Flora, seated himself beside Colin in the carriage.

"Good-bye!" said Flora, as the horses

started, "and don't forget my love to Phillis!" she added to Adam as he leant forward, looking to the last for that glance from Mignon, without which, he said to himself, he should take but a heavy heart to Scotland that day.

"I won't forget," he said, mechanically, his eyes still fixed on Mignon. To his dying day he never forgot the pattern of the gown she wore that morning, or the fashion of her hair; but the secret that her eyes guarded was a secret to the last, for not until the carriage had disappeared did she stir or look up. Then she turned and walked soberly enough along the garden path by Flora's side, who was far too full of her own woes to take heed of those of anybody else.

How irresistible is the eloquence of a thoroughly selfish person who discourses upon his grievances, and what a splendid power of rhetoric he possesses! Confused by no paltry considerations for the comfort of other people, he sweeps you away on a current of superb, because unconscious, egotism, and discourses upon his wrongs with a brilliancy and vigour that it would be folly indeed to

expect from a mere ordinary clod who is basely guided by the promptings of duty, and hampered by the deterrent pulls of courtesy and conscience.

But Mignon heeded not Flora's flights of eloquence: five words were ringing in her ears that had summarily checked the tears that just now had seemed imminent—"*Don't forget my love to Phillis!*"

And why, pray, should that message have been entrusted to Adam, not Colin?

No doubt he would give it her . . . was he not now on his road to her, to this girl upon whose sweetness and tenderness he might well be glad to repose himself, seeing how profoundly wretched was his married life . . . Nay, might it not be that he loved this Phillis, had loved her always, though his goodness of heart, and self-sacrificing impulse of generosity had impelled him to commit the folly of marrying another?

"Adam will see Phillis every day?" she said, breaking in abruptly upon Flora's peroration, much to the disgust and astonishment of that young matron.

"I suppose so," she said, indifferently; "indeed, I should say they will be inseparable, they were always very good friends! Are you growing jealous?" She paused to look sharply at Mignon. "If so, I *am* disappointed in you! I have quite admired your method of keeping Adam the gardener at a distance, and even gave you credit for being an apt disciple of Miss Porter!"

"And who was Miss Porter?" said Mignon, turning her head aside.

"Don't you know? 'Sir,' said Dr. Johnson (*à propos* of his marriage with that lady), 'it was a love-match on both sides. Sir, she had a notion that a woman of spirit should use her lover like her dog.'"

"But he is not my lover," were the words that sprang to, yet did not pass, Mignon's lips.

But aloud she said, "And why should one not treat a dog well? It is only a bad and cruel heart that takes advantage of a dumb, defenceless brute . . . . And I have never treated Adam, no indeed, in a bad way. How could I do that when he has been the best friend to me that a girl ever had?"

"He is a very excellent person, no doubt," said Flora, shrugging her shoulders; "unfortunately, these highly respectable people are extremely difficult to fall in love with—as you evidently find it."

"Nevertheless," said Mignon, softly, "he attracted—Phillis!"

"She is a little fool," said Flora placidly, "and just as ridiculous in her ideas as he is—they would have suited each other down to the ground, I verily believe. Not but what I dare say you and he will manage after a bit to 'worry along,' as Mark Twain says, as well as the rest of the badly matched married people in the world!"

They had reached the house by now, and Flora, to whom the study of the concerns of any but her own was inexpressibly fatiguing, resorted briskly to her own woes.

"Now that we *are* up," she said, "I should like to know what we are going to do with ourselves at this unholy hour? Talk about the early bird getting the worm; I heartily agree with Dundreary, the more fool the worm to be up so early!"

A footman entered, bearing the morning's letters, which he handed to Mrs. Dundas. Mignon was in the act of leaving the room when an exclamation from Flora arrested her steps.

"What *do* you think?" cried that young matron, her face beaming with smiles. "Élise (my most intimate friend) says that Mr. Colquhoun, who is one of the shooting party at Marly, told her yesterday that I was the very *image* of Lely's portrait of the beautiful Lady B—— at Hampton Court, one of the most famous beauties of her time! There is a nasty simper about most of that man's pictures," she added thoughtfully, "I hope there is not one about *this*—not that it will bear the least resemblance to me, if it has! I must go and see it" (with animation). "I shall not rest until I know whether it is a compliment or a libel. Supposing we go this very afternoon?"

"Why not this morning?" said Mignon quickly, upon whom there had fallen a great longing to be out in the open air and alone with her own thoughts. Once arrived at the

Court it would be easy enough to give Flora the slip.

"At *this* time of day?" said Flora, looking mistrustfully out of the open window, as though the beautiful fresh morning were something likely to seriously disagree with her; "why, the place will not be even open!"

"But Bushey Park will," said Mignon, almost feverishly, "and the carriage will be back from the station in a few minutes, and it would save a lot of trouble to go now——"

Vanity carried the day. In five minutes (for like all handsome people she never took the length of time over her toilette that a plain woman invariably does) Flora, all impatience to behold Lady B——'s portrait, had announced to the astonished coachman her intention of proceeding immediately to Bushey Park.

As they went along the familiar way, it seemed to Mignon that a great many years must have elapsed since she rode in a van, and dodged the French governess beneath the chestnut trees.

And when at last they came to that im-

perial avenue which the girl had last seen in its splendid array of rosy white, and pearly red—a sight that she had deemed one to be held fast within the memory when even faces had faded from the recollection, that, too, was in nowise the same; nor did the morning seem to her as exquisite as that spring one when she had met Philip and taken the first step towards accomplishing her destiny.

"We may as well get out and walk up the avenue," said Flora, in a dissatisfied tone—dissatisfied that she had not received one glance of admiration throughout the drive, and her vanity was absolutely clamouring for nourishment. Afar off, beneath the trees, she had discovered the figure of a man, that even at this distance bore a presentable air; she would see if in passing, she could not make *him* look at her.

Mignon was looking about her in search of the precise spot where she and Lu-Lu had so distinguished themselves. Had she passed it? But no! it was a little further on, and . . . . and *who* was this who came slowly towards her, his eyes downcast, his bearing

listless and weary, his beauty as faded as was that of the avenue itself, as worn and sad and weary a man as ever walked abroad in the early morning? Still without looking up, he approached more nearly, was passing them, nay, had already passed, when Flora with a sudden cry of welcome, turned, extended a ready hand, and—

"*You* here, of all people in the world!" she exclaimed in her high, clear voice. "Who would have dreamt of finding any one in or near town at this time of year?"

He looked up with a start and an involuntary frown, the loud, raised voice seeming to impress him disagreeably. He recognised her face, although he could not recall her name or where he had last seen it. Something of this doubt communicating itself to his glance, Flora reddened with ill-concealed vexation.

"Don't you remember Flora Dundas?" she said; "we have met often enough in Dublin!"

He remembered now, and made his apologies with due politeness. Flora had been right in saying that he had never been an

admirer of hers; her style, manner, and conversation had alike been displeasing to his fastidious taste, and he disliked nothing so much as a woman who is described by superlatives, with a "but" at the end. He liked no fruit without taste, no flower without scent; harmony in all things pleased him, and in Mrs. Dundas he found none.

"I had no idea that you had a taste for sylvan pleasures," said Flora. "I should have looked for you anywhere rather than here!"

"As I for you," he said carelessly; "but I happen to have a little place close by to which I sometimes come, and as I am fond of this old avenue, I often stroll in here."

"Alone?" said Flora, raising her eyebrows, with a peculiar inflexion in her voice that he perfectly understood.

"Quite alone," he answered.

"Then he has *not* married that woman," said Flora to herself; "and what is more, he never will now."

Aloud she said:

"I have been very remiss in not introducing to you my sister, Mrs. Montrose."

Then Philip, turning with a violent start, saw standing at a few paces from him—Mignon.

She was very pale, her hands were clasped tightly together—so much he gathered in the space of a moment; but he had not *looked* at her, he felt that he dared not, that more terrible to him than any other sight upon earth might be to him the answer to the question asked by his eyes.

The formal introduction over, he did not stir, he could not; but all at once he became conscious that a little hand, cold as his own, was touching his . . . . and then with a mighty effort he took it, and looked up. She would not have given him her hand thus had she known all; her husband had evidently told her nothing, and in her eyes as yet he was not the thing accursed that he had schooled himself to believe that he was.

Nevertheless the touch of her hand seemed to scorch him; he relinquished it with haste, and turned to Flora.

"I did not know that you were the sister of Mr. Montrose," he said, in a strangely dull,

mechanical fashion. "He was never with you in Dublin, I think?"

"Never!" said Flora. "You do not know him?"

"I have met him," said Mr. La Mert.

"We heard that you were abroad," said Flora.

"I have been and returned," he said absently, his mind busy with the riddle that Mr. Montrose's sister should introduce him to Mr. Montrose's wife. Could it be possible that she knew nothing of his love-suit to Mignon, or of other and more perilous matters?

Flora too was asking herself what on earth had come to this man, once the wildest, wittiest, most delightful companion a woman of fashion could ever hope to have by her side?

"He was taking his misfortunes to heart with a vengeance," she said to herself contemptuously; then turned and asked him was he going in her direction, in such fashion that, having no excuse ready, he went with the two young women on their way.

A child's touch would have drawn him onward, or plucked him back . . . . with one half of his soul he longed to look at Mignon, to hear her voice; with the other he dreaded to take his first conscious regard of her, not as the little sweetheart that he had so loved and coveted, but as the sister of the woman he had cruelly betrayed, and as the possible avenger of that woman's fate.

For days he had been dwelling near her, the one burning question upon his lips that it was imperative he should ask her, yet had been unable to summon sufficient courage to ask it, and now that he was face to face with her, it seemed more impossible still.

Nay, when the opportunity came half an hour later, he thrust it from him, to Mignon's confusion and despair, and the manner of his refusal was in this wise.

In the midst of Flora's search after the charming Lady B——, at which Mr. La Mert had assisted with so much politeness as to cause that young matron to reverse her hastily-formed decision on his dulness, he became aware of a soft little hand upon his

arm, and turning quickly, discovered Mignon's lovely troubled face looking into his own.

"I want to speak to you," the girl said in a whisper; "but *she* must not hear us. Can we not watch our opportunity and give her the slip?"

The schoolgirl expression fell oddly from her lips, the request was odder still. One would have said that he was thoroughly aware of its strangeness as he withdrew his arm from her touch, crying sternly, almost fiercely:

"No, Mignon, no!"

He would not lose this one hour of her company, of her kind, sweet, unconscious looks and ways; it might be the last, the very last, occasion that she would regard him without hatred and loathing; the evil store of the future was all too well assured to him, but this one precious hour of breathing-space was his, and he would not let it go!

Mignon's hand fell slowly by her side; the eager light faded out of her face, leaving it pale and chill . . . . she had so longed for him, so reckoned on him, and *now* . . . . he

troubled himself about her no longer, he had grown weary of her as had all the rest.

"I have found the picture," said Flora, swooping down upon the pair with an angry rustle of her sweeping skirts, "and it is nothing more or less than a gross libel. The eyes are brown, not grey, the mouth is at least two sizes larger than mine, and she has only one dimple, and that is in her chin! I shall tell Mr. Colquhoun when I see him that the *next* time he goes hunting for chance resemblance, she had better take his spectacles and his wits abroad with him!"

CHAPTER XVII.

"The spirit culls
Unfaded amaranth when wild it strays
Through the old garden-ground of boyish days."

"YOU frightened him," said Mrs. Dundas, tying her bonnet-strings with calm decision. "In polite society, my dear, young women do not request men whom they have never in their lives met before, to retire with them into quiet corners for private conversation! I saw a look of positive *fright* on the poor man's face when you asked him to go with you to the Maze, indeed I may say he almost *clung* to me till we got back to the carriage!"

Mignon, who stood at the window, prayer-book in hand, attired in a fresh Sunday morning gown and bonnet, made no reply, unless a

blush can be accounted one, so Flora proceeded at ease with her oration.

"There is no greater mistake than to *fasten on* to a man," shaking her head; "he always likes to be a free agent, and the moment he feels he is bound to do a thing he shies away from doing it. I should not be at all surprised if he has not called here because he is *afraid* of your making a dead set at him; though if you had not been in such a hurry to jump down his throat, he might rather have admired you, for you are possessed of two recommendations to his favour; you are fair, and you are married; nevertheless he is the last man in the world to pardon such a lack of *savoir faire* and experience as you displayed a week ago!"

She glanced complacently at her own reflection, looking at herself first over one shoulder, then over the other.

"If I were not a very amiable person," she continued, as she drew on her gloves, "I should be extremely angry with you, for what could be more irritating than to be bored to death here as I am, and to know that a charm-

ing man is close by who, but for your stupidity, would be coming to see me every other day? Such a splendid opportunity as I have got too, Colin, father, and Adam all away, either or all of whom would have guarded their doors jealously against him!"

"By the way," she added, "have you been writing to Adam?"

Mignon shook her head. Apparently her husband found it as difficult to write to her as she found it to write to him; perhaps he too had begun and never finished more than one letter; perhaps he had never thought about the matter at all.

"If you *should* be seized with a fit of affection," continued Flora, "don't mention Mr. Philip in your missive, or we shall have Adam the Gardener's substantial form flying back on the wings of the wind, and bad as our existence is, we don't want his company to make it worse."

"Perhaps Phillis did not find his company so very unbearable," thought Mignon to herself, as she followed her sister-in-law downstairs and out into the quiet road, along which

was passing the string of Sabbath morning folk, that went to church every Sunday of its life with an agreeable sense of duty performed, that became positive pleasure when accompanied by peace of mind, fatness of pocket, and a consciousness of possessing better clothes and prospects than its neighbour.

"Nothing could possibly have fallen out more delightfully for seeing something of the poor fellow, if you had not scared him out of his wits," said Flora, taking up her parable. "Did I not say to him, 'We are two forlorn women dying of *ennui*, without even the distraction of quarrelling with each other, and with both our husbands away,' and could a stronger inducement possibly be offered to such a man as Mr. Philip? I shall never get another such chance as long as I live!"

"But he *said* he would come," ventured Mignon, blushing guiltily, "and it is only a week ago; he may make his appearance yet."

"Not a bit of it!" said Flora, closing her parasol with emphasis as they reached the church-door. "He has probably gone abroad —he never stays long in one place; we

are not in the least likely to see him again!"

"Not in the least likely to see him again!"

These were the words that Mignon carried in with her through the church-door, that rang in her ears as she knelt and tried to pray, that stared at her from the open book that lay on her knees as she sat waiting for the clergyman to begin the service.

Flora, having arranged smelling-bottle, footstool, and prayer-book to her satisfaction, proceeded to look out for possible new bonnets and unlikely new men.

She usually brought her two sons, making their small souls sick within them as they sat bolt upright, holding on by their eyelids to the vicar's hook nose, lest sleep should overcome and ensure them a sound whipping later in the day. On one occasion Floss had been brought, but on that young person inquiring in awe-struck tones of Taffy, "Is that *Dawd?*" when the clergyman entered in his white robes, the experiment had not been repeated.

Flora's glance roving from face to face,

presently alighted upon one that communicated to her a smart shock of astonishment and pleasure. Mignon, sitting at some distance, very pale and still, became all at once aware that some male influence was at work upon Flora that had set all her airs and graces in full play, much as you may see a frisky young larch-tree go a-bobbing and a-curtseying when a May breeze goes at it full tilt.

Looking about her for the cause of this excitation of nerves and charms, Mignon, with a sudden stound of gladness, beheld Philip sitting at a considerable distance, clothed and in his right mind; in other words, looking pretty much as any other gentleman of a Sunday morning might do, and not much more dejected than any other member of the male sex present.

It is difficult to look as miserable when we are properly clad as when we are ragged and out at elbows. So long as we don't write our wretchedness in big capitals over our clothes, there are many people who will not discover the small writing that is inscribed upon our features.

He was looking at neither of the young women who honoured him with so intent a regard; he had already seen Mignon enter, marked her weary step and attitude, and now, his head bent on his hand, was thinking . . . . and his thoughts were such as he had done well to leave without the church-door, for they made of the words to which he had presumably come to hearken, but an empty sound and murmur.

"*When the wicked man turneth away from the sin that he hath committed . . . .*"

Mechanically he stood up with the rest, and absently asked himself when and where he had heard those words last . . . . and did the service always begin with them?

His hands were empty, it had not occurred to him to bring a prayer-book, indeed it would have puzzled him to know where to seek one.

By degrees the rufflings of Flora's plumage ceased, she grew sulky, and would have liked to pinch somebody. This man did not even see her, whereas formerly he had not required to be told when a handsome woman was sitting at a distance of forty yards from him; neverthe-

less she found one crumb of solid substantial comfort in the thought that there he was, and there he was likely to remain for the present, and it should go hard with her if he got away from the church without her intercepting him. Whereupon she sank on her knees with slightly recovered good humour, having first ascertained that Mignon was minding her book, and apparently doing nothing whatever to attract his attention.

The girl, too, was hugging to her breast the thought that presently—but ah! surely, *surely*, she would speak to him once more, walk by his side and hear his voice, and she, too, could afford to wait patiently until the service was over.

And Philip, his head still supported by his hand, his eyes fixed on the dusty stool at his feet, was recalling how Sunday after Sunday, when the first fever of his love-fit was upon him, he had come to this church, and, himself unseen, watched his unconscious little sweetheart busy at her prayers in the midst of the great empty pew that stretched away to right and left of her, while Prue, vigilant as any

dragon, sat in another just as long and dreary behind her.

Nay, it was in this very church that the love which hitherto had been formless and without name had suddenly leaped into vigorous, conscious life, it was here that had come to him the knowledge that she was his very heart, his life, that live without her he could not, that win her he must and would, yea, in this very house of God had taken root in his mind the sinful resolve that had fulfilled itself in a curse, of which the fruit was fatal and more bitter between his lips than had been death itself.

Good men have been led astray by the overmastering temptation of evil, but this man, who was deemed sinful as men go, had been led into his crowning wickedness by the power (hitherto unexerted) that purity and goodness had possessed to attract him. He had had a surfeit of sin, he knew her loathsome features all too well, he had grown to sicken at her touch, to find but corruption in all she breathed upon; he would have no more of her, but would woo virtue, that

stainless maid, and in the new delights that she would afford to him lose his old, disfigured self; there would fall from him for ever that sick, weary disgust of his own life and surroundings that had of late almost tempted him to that basest of cowardly crimes, self-destruction.

For through the dark night of his gloom and discontent, the girl Mignon had pierced like a sunbeam, and perhaps because he had met her first with the bonny flowers of the May morning over her head and under her feet, he associated her always in his own mind afterwards with all things fragrant, sweet, and lovesome, whereas that other to whom his love was due, had gradually come to be inseparably connected in his mind with the thought of annoyance and weariness. For the latter had committed the unpardonable sin (it is one that a man never forgives) of wearying him. A woman may storm, lie, deceive, be inconveniently fond of, or immoderately jealous of a man, and he may forgive her all these sins and many more; but once let her make him thoroughly uncom-

fortable in mind, body, and soul, once let his associations of her be unpleasant, not pleasant, ones, and all is over, and so long as she lives she will never regain her empire over that man.

A woman, at the mere mention of whose name a train of pleasant associations will arise, will maintain her hold over a man's heart or fancy long after the furnaces of passion have become cold and grey; nay, even after the woman has passed away the association may, and oftentimes does, remain, as the scent of a flower will outlive the flower itself.

If a man who has exhausted his stock of patience for the follies that wait upon the passions would answer truthfully the question what he most desired in a wife, he would reply, one who made him thoroughly comfortable. For oh! though a man may go down on his knees on an emergency, make vehement love on occasion, and even at a pinch fill the position of a hero with considerable grace, yet, when he does settle down, he dearly loves a woman who makes him comfortable!

He cannot always be in heroics, always sighing, dying, and rampaging; he wants something more satisfying and less fatiguing. To the woman who places him on good terms with himself, and who never worries him, he will be faithful to his life's end.

Now the poor creature who stood in Philip's mind for the exact antithesis of Mignon, being pure even in her ruin, could not rest contented in sin, but lived always in a fever of remorse and shame that made peace or comfort impossible to her, and drove away all chance of anything but misery for herself and fellow-sinner. Day by day the chain that bound them grew more and more heavy, day by day they sickened of each other's society, and dully looking ahead to the life that they were doomed to drag out together, peered in each other's faces with a loathing that was almost hatred. That she did not even love him he had in those past days grown to believe, else why had he heard again and again upon her sleeping lips the cry of "Gabriel! Gabriel!" uttered, too, with a passion that his own name had never called forth?

Nevertheless he had then no thought of turning back; he had promised to marry her when he should be free, and he would keep his word to the letter . . . . or so he had always said to himself until a certain morning in the month of May. Looking back upon this time, many things became clear to him that had then seemed dark, and he understood now why Muriel had prevailed upon him to go to that little place of his, unvisited for years, whence she could steal now and again for peeps of her sister, whom she dared not seek openly until in the eyes of the world she was—honest.

And as he sat and thought, still with down-bent head, unconscious of the risings-up and down-kneelings of the worshippers around him, his heart grew hot within him with anger as he thought that if Muriel's pride (ever a great barrier between them) had not been so intense and morbid that he had never been able to draw from her one word concerning her people or relatives, that this miserable complication would never have come to pass, that then he would have loved

Mignon as a sister, not with this fatal love that had already entailed upon his soul a guilt the full measure of which he had not as yet ascertained.

He raised his head and looked across at Mignon, regarding her from an entirely new point of view. It seemed to him that he should never again get back to the first impression he had of her . . . . At the present moment he was seeking in her face for a resemblance to her sister. No, there was no resemblance. Features, colouring, expression, even dimples, were all different; a man might see the two girls side by side and never dream that the same blood ran in the veins of each. As he looked at Mignon her face faded, and another rose before him in its stead—a face young, fresh, more beautiful even than Mignon's (though not in his eyes), and but a few years older, who had loved, pitied, and sacrificed herself for him, and to whom—a poor return for the wasted treasure of her youth, innocence, and beauty—he had vowed a vow, and then dishonoured himself for ever by breaking it!

Where was she now, and to what fate had she hurried away on that day when she found his diary, and discovered his love for another woman? He had not needed to tell her of his contemplated baseness, she had discovered it for herself, and in her agony, and heeding not that she herself destroyed the last chance of returning to her sister, she had disappeared from his sight, and though he had sought her in many lands, and though at that very time detectives were busy in every great city in England and abroad, watching for her among the lowly workers of the earth as among the sisterhood of the frail, he had sought her in vain, and of late had come to believe that neither he, nor Mignon, nor any other that loved her would see her face again, for that she was dead.

And if it were so, then he would never dare to take Mignon's hand again, or speak her name . . . . he would go his way, a man who knew himself to be a murderer before God, and Mignon's fate would be to watch and wear her life away for the sister who would never come.

But if Muriel were found, if she would accept at his hands the tardy reparation he offered her, then there might be some scanty store of peace for him in the days that were to come, and perhaps, after a long while, Mignon might be able to find it in her heart to forgive him.

He had returned hither, not to see Mignon, but because he had a conviction that if Muriel were living she would probably be coming from time to time to steal a look at her sister. Perhaps Mignon had news of her . . . . could assist him in his search ; and so, having failed to summon up courage to pay that promised visit to Mrs. Dundas, of which mention has been made, he had come to church that morning with the determination of no longer postponing the evil day, but of seeing and having speech with Mignon, if she so willed.

The ordeal must be faced ; why not now as well as any other time ?

And then he wakened with a start to the fact that the pulpit was empty, that the church-goers had departed, that he was sitting all alone with empty pews before and behind

him, and that a pair of blue eyes were looking into his, while the sweetest voice in all the world was saying to him in a whisper, "Flora says, are you going to stay here for the afternoon service, or don't you think it would be pleasanter to come back with us to luncheon?"

CHAPTER XVIII.

"And when I came to feel how far above
All fancy, pride, and fickle maidenhood,
All earthly pleasures, all imagined good,
Was the warm tremble of a devout kiss . . ."

IN the churchyard without—for, unlike most churches nowadays, there was a God's-acre attached to this one, where the dead might repose themselves, and have some chance of keeping their memories green in the hearts of their friends—Flora impatiently waited and wondered, and asked herself, was the man mad, or was *she* to so trouble her head about him?

But when he came through the doorway at Mignon's side, hat in hand, his eyes looking as though the sun had got into and dazzled them, she forgave him all his sins on

the spot, for was he not a man, and a well-favoured one, and had she not as catholic a love for his sex as she had a hatred for her own?

"Do you do *sums* in church?" she said laughingly, as their hands met, "or were you digesting the German idea, that in the next world all inefficient clergymen are condemned to read the bad sermons they have preached in this?"

"I was doing neither," said Philip; "but I fear I am not a good subject for church, or at least so three old women seemed to think who prodded me rather violently in the back, and, I fancy, rapped me at intervals on the head with hymn-books!"

"They found all your places for you," said Flora, as they passed through the churchyard together; "but you neither accepted nor returned thanks for their favours!"

He had recovered himself somewhat by now, he had served too long an apprenticeship to playing the fool not to be able to play it again on occasion, and Mignon, as she followed the pair, fell to asking herself desperately

what chance would she have of speaking with him alone that day?

At Mr. Montrose's door Flora, entering, was surprised to find that her companion did not follow her, and he, turning and coming face to face with Mignon, was startled in his turn at the emotion the girl's face betrayed.

Flora, vigilant and impatient, cut short any words that might be about to pass between them by crying out, "Luncheon waits, and, like Gilpin, I am faint and—and" (blankly) "you mean to say that you actually *cannot stay?*"

"I have an engagement in the neighbourhood," he said; "but with your permission I will call later in the afternoon." And before Flora could recover her breath, he had raised his hat and was gone.

He had intended to enter, he wished to get his interview, that inevitable and painful interview, with Mignon over, but at the last moment there had come a violent revulsion of feeling, and it had seemed to him that it would choke him to eat bread in Mignon's company, to be a guest at the table where she sat, when if she knew all she would

count the whole world not wide enough to come between them.

"It could not have been you that time," said Flora, as she sat five minutes later at luncheon. "Do you know I actually believe he thinks it improper to come here while we're in this husbandless state, though if he's going to take to the proprieties in his old age, then all I can say is, more's the pity!"

"But he is coming back?" said Mignon, looking up hastily.

"So he *says!*" remarked Flora; "but did he not make the same engagement the other day, and may he not fail to keep this one as he did that?" Her voice was sharp, her fine plumes sat upon her with a neglected air, she appeared to be growing absolutely thinner under her long-continued deprivation of flirtation and admiration.

As the meal progressed, however, she gradually became more amiable. Like all women of her build, she was more than something of a *gourmande*, and short of an insult to her vanity and her complexion, resented nothing so much as badly served and cooked food.

"If England were not such a ridiculously straitlaced place," she said, reverting to her grievances when the servants had left the room, "how pleasantly one could manage to rub along with a lawful husband *and* an acknowledged admirer! Why should we not have a *cicisbeo* apiece as a Spanish lady has, whose duty it is to attend her when she goes abroad, and make himself generally useful, ornamental, and agreeable, as husbands never do?"

"Are *all* husbands monsters?" said Mignon, rather indignantly.

"They are worse," said Flora, with the calmness of settled conviction; "they are bores, well-meaning ones no doubt; but when once they get up off their knees they cease to be either amusing or interesting. Of course they are necessary evils, but why in the name of all that is reasonable cannot one have a good-tempered sober-sides at home, and an agreeable walking-stick for taking with one when one walks abroad? For unfortunately, my dear, the good estimable creature that one finds it safest to marry is very rarely—from

top to toe—presentable! There seems to be an absolute irreconcilability between a man whose coat fits him to perfection and—virtue! In fact, one may say that the excellence of his get-up is exactly in inverse ratio to the satisfactoriness of his morals, and he would probably be a detestable creature to marry, while the other honest soul does well enough as a spouse! The moral of all which is, that it would save a great deal of scandal, flirtation, and wickedness if Mrs. Grundy would only smile kindly on *cicisbeos* and allow them to be duly authorised and provided for in the marriage settlements!"

"And if you might have one," said Mignon, resting her chin on her slender hand, "whom would you choose?"

"Philip La Mert," replied Flora promptly; "that is to say, Philip as he used to be, not as he is now! He will soon be himself again, however; he has only grown a little rusty from disuse, and I have no doubt will be just as wild and delightful as ever, before long!"

"I wonder if he will come?" said Mignon,

walking to the window and looking out, "and I wonder what time he means by late in the afternoon?"

"Are you plotting to get him all to yourself, you ridiculous little babe-in-the-wood?" said Flora, laughing outright; "let me warn you, then, my dear, that I do not intend to give you a chance of getting your infant mind corrupted by Mr. Philip's gallant speeches! The children are expecting you upstairs, and there you had better remain. Of course you know the old adage about two being company, etc. You do? Then I need not impress its admirable common sense upon you. By the way, how do you like me in this dress? Don't you think that new pale green one suits me better? This makes me look rather stout, which I *am not*."

And she revolved slowly before Mignon's abstracted eyes.

"It looks very nice," said the girl, recovering her wits with a start; "but I think, yes, I am sure I like the other one best;" and then she sighed, not at the thought of Flora's gowns, but because she saw her chance of

speech with Philip becoming more and more remote. She stood for a long while without stirring after Flora had gone to be rearrayed, but started into intensest, most wide-awake life as presently the faint sound of approaching footsteps fell upon her quick ears.

Apparently Mr. La Mert's engagement had been a short one; at any rate there he was at the house-door, and finding it widely open and no servants about, stood hesitating for a moment on the threshold. At that moment the dining-room door gently unclosed, and Mignon stood in the aperture.

Placing her finger upon her lips she went forward on tiptoe, and taking him by the hand she drew him into the drawing-room. With her disengaged hand she softly closed the door, then led him to a chair, drew one close to him for herself, sat down on it, looked at him, clasped her hands together, and gave the biggest, deepest, longest sigh any young woman ever heaved who was untrammelled by tight stays, or held in check by the usages of polite society.

"You must not speak above a whisper,"

said the girl, "or *she* will come down directly. She is putting on a pale green gown, and—and—I hope there are dozens of buttons, and hooks, and eyes, for we are not likely to get such a chance as this again for *ages,* and oh!" (here the whisper was abandoned for the round vigorous notes of hearty self-gratulation) "I never in *all* my life was so glad to see anybody as I am at this moment to see *you!*"

Philip's perception of humour was not very great, nevertheless the grim irony of the situation could not but strike him keenly.

One of those ungovernable impulses that now and again possess people, urging them to some word or act that to the onlooker savours of madness, impelled him to burst into sudden, discordant laughter, and ask her did she know who and what he was, that she received him with so many manifestations of joy?

The moment of danger passed, but left him so pale, that Mignon forgot herself to exclaim with concern, "You are ill—suffering?"

"Ay . . . . I suffer . . . ." he said, below his breath; aloud, "I am well enough. Do you not know," he said, with a strange smile,

"that there are two persons in the world of whom it is never safe to speak—yourself and your enemy?"

"But you are ill," said Mignon, putting aside his speech; "and—and—you do not look happy," she added; then, frightened at herself and her boldness, averted her eyes from his face.

Hitherto he had not looked at her, but now he did so, unwillingly, painfully, then a sharp pang ran through him as he saw how changed she was, how pale and thin she had grown . . . . and this too was some more of his work.

"And you," he said involuntarily, "are *you* happy?"

A sudden colour flamed in her cheeks. "How can I be that?" she said swiftly; then her eyes sank, her colour faded, she sighed, in such fashion that one who understood such matters would have said, "This girl's heart is full of the vague yearning and trouble of love, but as yet she is unconscious of it, and more prone to resent than acknowledge its influence."

"I fear we are none of us very happy nowadays, Mignon," he said sadly; and then the girl looked quickly across at him, remembering his story, and her heart filled with a pity that most assuredly he did not deserve.

"Forgive me," she said gently; "I had forgotten . . . . but perhaps it may all come straight to you, as to me, some day?"

He looked at her with sudden fear: had she heard anything—could it be possible that she *suspected?*

"What do you know of my happiness or unhappiness," he said harshly, "of my past or of my future, Mignon?"

"I heard your story," she said simply, and with her head still turned aside, "and—and I saw your wife once, and I was . . . . sorry for you."

She was sorry for him! He bowed his head in his hands and groaned aloud, and the girl, with mingled fear and wonder, noted how grey his hair had grown, how impossible it now was to complain that his eyes were too blue and his hair too black!

He lifted his head with a kind of reckless courage.

"Have you received any news of your sister?" he said.

She sprang to her feet.

"Have not *you?*" she cried.

"I?" he said, in slow, measured tones. "And why should I be likely to do that?"

"Then you have brought me no news of my darling?" cried the girl, wringing her hands. "You have come to me empty-handed, when I have been so longing, so *praying*, to see you again, because I felt certain you knew something of, could tell me something about her . . . ."

"I have nothing to tell you," he said.

"From that day . . . . in the Morgue . . . . to this," said Mignon feverishly, "you have not heard one word of her, good, bad, or indifferent?"

"I have not heard one word."

"You are a man," she cried wildly, almost fiercely; "you are free to go where you will, to wander half the world over, and if you had possessed one grain of pity for a poor girl who

may have been wronged, betrayed, forsaken, you would have asked, you would have inquired—you would have gleaned some scraps of information about her ; but you are like all the rest, you do not care, *nobody* cares what may become of her but me . . . ."

Was the light that came through the closed *persiennes* a ghastly one, or might the fault be looked for in Mr. La Mert's own complexion ?

Mignon, catching sight of his face, paused abruptly in her reproaches.

"I beg your pardon," she said, humbly; "God knows it is not for me to take you to task, or to say you should do this or that . . . . she was nothing to you, why should you ? Only *somehow* I have had a feeling all along, ever since that day, that you took an interest in her, that you were *sorry* for her, that you had met, and perhaps spoken with her in Dublin, and once or twice it has occurred to me that perhaps she might have married somebody that you knew, perhaps even some *friend* of yours ?"

Some friend of his ! Would Mrs. Duncas

never come? Would he have to sit here for ever undergoing the terrible ordeal of this girl's cross-examination?

He had prepared himself for something bad, but not for this.

"What question was she going to put to him next?" he asked himself, as she stood facing him, her fingers nervously interlaced, her eyes full of a certain shame and piteous question, all in one.

"Sir," she said, at last, desperately, "can you tell me if my sister be married?"

He was staggered for a moment by the blow, then he said doggedly—

"I cannot tell you."

She shrank back, then, seizing her courage, went resolutely on.

"But you knew her—in Dublin?"

"Yes."

Though he were convicted of his sin the next moment, he could not have answered her, "No."

"You saw her?" cried the girl, springing forward; "and was she well—*happy?*"

"She seemed both."

Ay, that was true enough, at any rate, she had been—then.

"Perhaps you would not be likely to hear of it," she said, drooping her head, "but did you ever hear that she had — a sweetheart ?"

"Yes."

"And he wanted to—to marry her ?"

"He could not marry her then," said Philip, looking downward, and becoming a deeper villain in his own eyes with every word he uttered; "but afterwards . . . . when he became free, it was his greatest desire on earth that she should be his wife."

"Then that explains everything," cried the girl, a great light of joy breaking over her face; "her silence—her letter—all—even the strange question she asked Miss Sorel about my *suspecting* her, and the promise she made that she would return to me at the end of two years. . . . She was afraid that some gossip or other might reach me, and she wanted to guard against it, and Miss Sorel, and—others —misunderstood her, as though I might not have known that no harm could ever come to

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my beautiful, proud Muriel, whom everybody loved. . . ."

She turned suddenly to Philip. The contrast of her transfigured lovely face to his was striking, but she was too full of her own joy to heed his looks.

"I was angry with you just now," she said; "I was so *bitterly* disappointed, for you see, I did not know what precious news you were bringing me; but I hope you will forgive me, and I thank, I bless you, for having made me so happy, as *she* will when she comes, and I tell her all about you. . . ."

When she came! . . . . he bent his head lower still. How long, how long, was this agony to continue?

"God forgive me," she said, looking upwards, "but I have had hard thoughts of this man whom Muriel loves. I have even grown to think of him as her enemy, and all the time—all the time, he loved her, all this long time he has been faithful and true to her always. . . . I might have known that *no one* would have had the heart to wrong my darling, least of all the man whom she *loved* . . . ."

Philip could bear it no longer, he started up, crying vehemently, "He is a bad man, Mignon, a bad man! He is utterly unworthy of Muriel's love, and your good opinion——"

He paused; his heart aching as he saw all the sweet colour, all the new-found joy, dying out of Mignon's face, leaving it pale and chill.

"A bad man!" she repeated mechanically.

"Ay! I know him!"

"He would not be kind to her, you think," she said, trembling, "and perhaps it is all his doing that she has not written, or sent one word to me all this long time?"

He turned aside; he had meant to prepare her somewhat for that which might be in store for her, but he could not; it was beyond his strength to dash the colour from her rainbow hopes, to leave her here, to the long and empty days of waiting, with a heavy foreboding heart—no, let what might come after, she should keep this one hour of gladness.

"Mignon," he said very sadly, "do not part with your bright hopes, and, if you can, keep

still your kindly thoughts of this man, who if he has sinned, has also suffered . . . . suffered . . . ."

He pressed his hand suddenly against his side, his face took a greyer shade—how old he looked, how desperately weary and miserable!

"Muriel would not love him if he were a bad man," said the girl, lifting her head suddenly; "and it is a very easy thing to say of a man that he is bad; yes, because it is not possible for any one to look into his soul and see what is there, and I have been told before now that men are bad, whom I have found good, with true and gentle hearts. . . ."

She paused, changing colour, and he understood why she had paused.

"People have told you so of me, for instance?" he said.

"I did not believe them," she said gently, "and if they were wrong about you, why should not you be wrong about *him?* . . . . I want you to make me a promise," she added, lifting her imploring blue eyes to his, "and then I shall be able to sit down and wait for her here with a good heart . . . .

Flora has told me that you go about the world a great deal, never stopping very long in one place, and of course you must see a great many people, therefore there is a good chance, is there not, that sooner or later you may run up against *her* or *him*?"

"And if I do," he said, trembling, "what then?"

"I know it is a very great favour to ask of you," she said, "but I want you to promise me that if you should see her, you will come straight away to me here, whether it be by day or night, and say, 'I have found her—come!' And I will follow you, if needs be, to the world's end."

He sprang up, the beads of sweat standing on his brow. She asked him . . . . this?

It was beyond his strength: he would not take this vow; be blenched before the task of coming to her with his own condemnation on his lips, for one of those chill and unaccountable shadows that go before a great misfortune lay on his heart then, and told him that when next he saw Muriel it would be for evil, not for good.

"Ask me some other thing, Mignon," he cried fiercely, "but not that, not that!"

"Is it so great a trouble to you then?" said the girl piteously. "It might happen that she is alone in a strange land, or sick, or miserable, not able to come or send to me, and if you knew it, you who have seemed to be her friend and mine always, would it be quite kind of you not to let me know?"

If ever she were sick or sorry . . . if . . . and at this very moment she was wandering houseless, homeless, perhaps starving . . . and Mignon sought to exact this promise from him when she believed her sister to be well guarded and cared for. What, then, would be the vehemence of her demand did she know the truth? Ay, his manliness, his honour, his duty, all compelled him to take this vow upon him; it was a part of his punishment, and he would not shrink from it.

"You promise?" she said, her eyes, full of a child's unquestioning trust and sweetness, fixed upon his averted face.

Something of the old dauntless courage that had made him once feared among men

shone in his eyes as he turned at last and faced her.

"I promise," he said.

A rustle of silken flounces, an exclamation of astonishment, a faint perfume of lavender-water, and, armed *cap-à-pie*, enter Flora.

"*Upon* my word!" she says, each syllable falling on the ears of the listeners in sharpest notes of ejaculation, "and may I ask how long you have been entertaining Mr. La Mert?"

"How long?" says Mignon, turning her eyes on Philip with an assured friendliness that still further exasperated Mrs. Dundas. "How long would you say—half-an-hour—an hour—more?"

Flora positively gasped, less perhaps at the girl's assurance than at the new vivid, bright beauty that had come to her, and that made this chit more than a match for herself, *savoir faire*, superior colouring, Parisian gown, and all!

"The children are waiting for you," she said coldly; "they have been expecting you all the afternoon."

And she sank into the chair, drawn suspiciously close to Mr. La Mert's, that Mignon had just vacated.

"Good-bye," said the girl, holding out her hand to Philip; her eyes giving him all the warm thanks her lips dared not utter, "and you'll come again soon, *very* soon, won't you?"

CHAPTER XIX.

"How the blood
Left *her* young cheek; and how *she* used to stray
She knew not where, and how *she* would say *nay*,
If any said 'twas love, and yet 'twas love,
What could it be but love?"

SQUALLS had set in at Mrs. Dundas's present abode, the weathercock pointed to "Stormy," and whippings, slaps, and punishments were as plentiful as blackberries in season.

Flora was bored to death, and Flora had been wounded in her only vulnerable point, her vanity; and as she always made a point of passing on to other people any inconvenience she might herself experience, she contrived to make the whole household extremely uncomfortable. One person only

(though not of her household) appeared perfectly indifferent to her humours, and came and went as before, heeding her not at all. Flora regarded her sometimes with an angry wonder, for the girl seemed to carry some charm that rendered her impervious to outward influences, yet keenly alive to those inward ones that painted her cheek a lovely red, that brought fire to her eyes and lips, that, in short, supplied the one thing necessary to make her beauty irresistible—expression.

One would have said that some new influence had crept into her life and coloured it, that some feeling was growing in her heart that caused her mingled joy and pain, but that the sweetness outweighed the unrest, the sure and certain hope the timid and trembling fear.

And Flora, troubling herself about no intricacies of hidden feeling, concerning herself merely with this girl's suddenly revived brightness and beauty, looked at her—and wondered at this hitherto despised schoolgirl, who no longer merged her own identity in hers (Flora's), and who dared to assume day

by day those adorable airs and graces that beautify a woman when she has just made the discovery that she has a heart, that she possesses the power of charming, and that some one loves her . . . . Mrs. Dundas's sole consolation being that if all these signs were occasioned by Mr. La Mert, then he was proving himself tolerably indifferent to them, since he had not once repeated the visit made on that Sunday afternoon when Mignon had behaved with a dishonesty that awakened in Flora all the just resentment of a noble nature.

"Of course my opinion is of no value," she had said loftily, and swooping down on the girl so very quickly after Mignon's own exit from the drawing-room as to convince her that Mr. La Mert must have cut his visit very short indeed, "but when I was your age, I should not have *dreamt* of entertaining a young man all by myself, *especially* when I was aware that his visit was paid, not to me, but to another person."

"But I thought two was company, and three trumpery?" said Mignon, looking up

from the big volume whence she was expounding (after her lights) the parable of the "Marriage at Cana" to Colin and Floss.

"That entirely depends on whom the two may be," said Flora crushingly; "in this case, and judging by Mr. La Mert's face when I entered, he would have found *three* far better company."

"He was not at all dull with me," said the girl; "indeed I am sure that neither of us were thinking about you; it was only when we heard your dress outside that we even recollected you!"

"I do not wish my daughter's morals contaminated," said Flora, her face supplying all the colour that her gown lacked—and the sight of this young matron declaiming moral sentiments from a pedestal of virtue was a sight to make Mignon figuratively rub her eyes as she looked—"therefore I beg that in her presence you will not converse with such freedom concerning your impropriety of conduct."

"Oh dear," said Mignon, bursting into a hearty laugh, "poor Floss! She *is* beginning

early!" And then she reverted to the parable, and Flora went angrily away, and bad days began, as I have said, for the young Dundases, and the Dundas dependents.

Fortunately, however, the period of measles was nearly over, and another week would see Mr. Montrose's house empty, and the whole family established at Glen-luce.

Mignon would be left all alone, and yet she did not feel dull at the prospect; on the contrary, the thought elated her, and a letter she received one morning about this time, a mere friendly little letter that all the world might have read and been none the wiser for reading, and to which she made no reply, since she was to see the writer so shortly, sent her pulses leaping, her heart dancing, so that it was to a strain of music, inaudible to all ears but her own, that her steps moved with so gay a measure.

On this particular day, as she walked with Colin the younger, and Floss, beneath the trees, all shining in the sun with the rain that had but just ceased falling, she felt that earth was fair, that God was good, that her

years were but a little over sixteen, and that she and the world had a long and perhaps merry account to settle with each other yet. How brave was the red, and brown, and sepia, of the leaves overhead! how intense and clear the light upon distant objects! and how keen and sweet the air, that seemed to meet the breath of summer half way, and shake hands with her ere he gently bade her farewell, and renewed his old league with approaching winter! She could gaze on all the signs of the season without Milnes' miserable poem passing through her mind, that compels the soul to see decay and corruption everywhere visible, rather looking forward to the spring-winds that would blow, to the new life that would take its birth from the extinction of the old, to the good days, full of life and peace and joy, that the year that was coming would usher in.

Muriel was safe, Muriel would not be long now; Philip's words had removed from the girl's heart the shadow that had so cruelly darkened it. And she had another secret source of joy, that she scarcely dared to ac-

knowledge; but which she sometimes guiltily felt to be a species of disloyalty to her sister.

Floss and Colin did not disturb her thoughts; they were indeed industriously engaged in the delightful occupation of walking into every puddle to which they came—a process not particularly favourable to promoting their convalescence, but of which Mignon took no heed.

"And now which way shall we go?" she said, pausing as she came to three roads turning different ways; "shall we go towards Brentford, or Hounslow, or Hampton Court?"

"'Ampton Court," says Floss with decision; "there's a sweetie shop that way."

And she takes the turning that will end in bull's-eyes without a moment's hesitation, Mignon following.

In due time the bull's-eyes are bought, carefully divided between two people, thankfully sucked, and deeply regretted (when the last has vanished).

They have got clear away into the country roads now, between the glistening hedges,

and with no houses to come between the eye and the stormy blue sky above.

Every pale dandelion that lurked in the dripping grass of the roadside, every diamond drop of rain that flashed high on the bough, every cloud that scudded across the sky, formed to her the question, Yes or No? Yes or No? And the answer was sometimes the one, sometimes the other, so that she had no more reason to be satisfied with the result of her queries, than to despair. Was it possible for the flower of love to bloom for a space, wither, then burst forth again in renewed beauty and vigour? Must not the interval of frost and starvation destroy the plant, so that when warmth and sunshine should at last return to it, they would arrive too late?

No. True love could never die, it was only the false love that withered away, dependent on outward influences. Did not Parthenia sweetly and truly sing:

"'And tell me how love cometh?'
'Tis here—unsought—unsent.
'And tell me how love goeth?'
That was not *love* which went."

And if the song were true, then love was to be this girl's portion. It had been hers once—she knew it now; and though once she had spurned the precious gift, might she not, even thus late in the day, stretch out her hand, and gather it to her breast?

"Take care, Arty!" cried the children's shrill voices in the distance, and then Mignon looked up with a start from the ragged cluster of leaves and ferns she held in her bare hand, to see that a dogcart was close upon her, but as she stood aside for it to pass, it stopped suddenly, and Philip La Mert, throwing the reins to a servant, in another moment was standing by her side.

"I was on my way to call on you," he said, his eyes taking in every lovely detail of the girl's face, the damask cheeks, the tender troubled eyes, the sweet lips—

"Like leaves of crimson tulips met,"

—that, although he knew it not, had never given or received a real lover's kiss yet.

He sent his dogcart back, and walked on by her side. The man-servant's back expressed

absolute know-nothingness as he vanished, but his mouth was screwed up into the form of a whistle.

"Master's up to his old tricks," he said; "he've been very quiet lately, but he's a-busting out again—*he* is."

"Is it not a beautiful day?" said the girl, looking all about her; "do you not like one of these changing, blowing, laughing, and weeping days ever so much better than those *dead* summer or winter ones, when there is no change in all the twelve hours save in the degree of light?"

"It is a beautiful day, as you say, Mignon," he replied, but his eyes rested not on the landscape or heavens, but on her face; and as he looked, he could for a moment fancy that all the miserable events of the past few months were a dream, and that it was but yesterday he had seen and fallen in love with the happy girl who walked by his side. This was no pale neglected wife, no wearily waiting sister; this was the Mignon that he used to love . . . . used to love . . . . was there ever any past in his love for her? did he not

love her infinitely more passionately, more deeply now than he had ever loved her in those by-gone days?

As they walked together, there fell no silence between them, though Philip's voice was but rarely heard. A very Ariel of fancy and play seemed to have taken possession of Mignon that day, and, as Philip hearkened, he likened her dainty conceits and happy talk to the little wild flowers that may bloom on the top of a volcano, that is to all appearance extinct, yet may at any moment uprear itself, scattering death and desolation around. When at length they turned homewards, some of the beauty of the day had departed, and a soft, fine mist was creeping up over the land. They were close upon Lilytown when Philip's eyes became all at once attracted by something unusual in the appearance of Mignon's hand. He was walking on her left side, and the hand that held her autumn spoils was ungloved.

"Where is your wedding-ring?" he exclaimed involuntarily.

She turned her head aside, but answered not a word.

He felt that he *must* see the expression on that averted face, his pulses beat like sledge-hammers, his blood seemed to be on fire as he stepped behind her, and came round to her other side.

Glancing downwards he saw, O! God help him, and her . . . . he saw the saddest, pitifullest, most terrible sight in her face with which the world from end to end had furnished him . . . . he read that in her eyes which he had seen in the eyes of many women, and always, alas for him! a look that once seen could never be mistaken—a look that came but with the first dawn, and blush, and tremble of conscious love. She laid her hand upon his arm, her beauty intoxicated him, her lovely voice sank like a charm into his heart as she said, "I took it off because . . . . because . . . ." her voice ended in a sigh, her eyes met his, soft and sweet as summer . . . . he, still gazing at her, saw, marked, *understood*, then, freeing himself with a fiercer effort from the spell that bound

him, he broke away from her, and was lost to sight in a moment.

* * * * * *

The mist and the rain had cleared away, the moon, now in her second quarter, showed as a gentle and benignant spirit amidst the wrack of clouds that scudded like phantom snowdrifts across the sky.

Mignon, leaning from her chamber window, half in light, half in shadow, the only creature awake in the sleeping household, looked abroad, and took commune with her own heart—the heart that was so full of the stir and throb of a new passion as to make dull the fine spiritual sense that at any other time would surely have informed her of the neighbourhood of the sister whom, until now, she had loved with the unswerving devotion of a lifetime.

For down yonder, in the shadow, crouches a shivering woman, whose uplifted eyes are fixed, with a worship almost savage in its intensity, on Mignon's happy face, which her poor cold pallid lips are murmuring words of blessing and fondness that surely,

surely the girl's ears above might almost catch.

For the first time in her life Mignon was unfaithful to her sister; for the first time her fancy painted a happiness in which Muriel was not the central figure, and a love, even greater than was her love for her sister, shouldered the memory of that sister away. I wonder why, when we are happy, and desire to express our joy with special earnestness, we instinctively turn to those old ballads and songs that seem to say so much more beautifully and effectually for us than we could for ourselves, the ideas and thoughts that struggle to find speech within us?

It must be that the men who wrote them have but put into words some great yearning common alike to every human heart, which all recognise and are grateful for; the dumb want was there, but the expression of it lacking, and so we love and are grateful to those great masters who have come to our help. Had any one ever before sung the song that rippled over Mignon's lips, as she mused and dreamed in the moonbeams? No, she

felt sure it belonged to her, and no one else . . . . that it had been written by no one, sung by no one but herself, and that only one person in the world could possibly understand it, and that was the man to whom she sang it.

"Could ye come back to me, Douglas, Douglas,
In the old likeness that I knew;
I could be so loving, so tender and true,
Douglas, Douglas, tender and true."

Her voice, very sweet and low, reached the woman beneath. "She is thinking of her husband," she thought; "she is happy . . . ."

A little longer and Mignon, extending her arms as though in farewell to the sleeping garden, withdrew from the window and closed it.

A kind of stupor seemed to fall on the watcher as the girl vanished; she fell forward on her face among the dank grass, and lay perfectly still.

"You might have stayed a little longer, my heart . . . . my heart . . . ." she moaned, "for something tells me that this is the last time I shall watch for thee, and that the end is near." She rose, drew her poor drenched

clothes closer around her, looking upwards once more. "Thank God she will never know . . . . never know . . . ." then she went slowly away, and never by summer nor winter, in springtide or autumn, came the footsteps of the poor wanderer thither again.

CHAPTER XX.

"O, limèd soul, that struggling to be free
Art more engaged!"

ALL that night Philip La Mert wandered abroad, a man pursued of devils, neither knowing nor caring whither his steps might lead him.

What was this thing that had overtaken him, that had added curse to curse, retribution to retribution, in sheer wantonness of cruelty, until this last, this unimagined evil had come to place the last link in the chain of horror?

He had sinned—ay, but other men had sinned also, and they had gone lightly on their way, neither dreaming of nor being overtaken by punishment of any sort or

description. He had committed a wrong, which he had meant to repair; he had been so dishonourably weak as to turn back from that resolve, but very quickly he had reverted to it, and he was not to blame if it had never been carried out. From that first sin, that the world would call venial, had sprung a succession of circumstances that had combined to render him the shuttlecock of fate, the plaything of chance, until the climax had come to him—to-day.

To-day, when there had fallen to his hand a gift that once had been precious exceedingly, that he had longed for, sinned for, even in his own wild fashion prayed for, but that now was the most terrible, unwelcome guest that ever knocked at the heart of man.

God knew that he had long ago given up coveting it; that when he had talked with her it had been with anguish to his heart, no thought of winning her love, that it had never once entered into his wildest imaginations that the thing once so sweet and natural, now so monstrous and horrible, should come to pass, that Mignon should—love him.

The thought pursued him like an avenging fiend; it drove him on and on through the stormy night, and at length, after hours of wandering, he found himself back again almost at the point whence he had started, standing beneath the trees in Bushey Park, looking up through the swaying interlacing boughs at the sky overhead, hearkening to the soughing and complaining of the night winds as they whirled, and twisted, and beat about the tops of the giant trees, every now and then scattering a handful of brown and yellow leaves on the lonely watcher below. He shivered, tried to collect his thoughts, to argue, to reason, but whatever fresh train of thought he began, it always came back to this—that Mignon loved him.

She loved him. And at any moment the summons might come through one of the creatures who kept vigilant watch for Muriel, that would compel him, in observance of his vow, to go straight to Mignon and tell her that he had joined her long-lost sister . . . this was his fate, this the errand on which he

had pledged himself to go to the woman who . . . . loved him.

To see the love in her blue eyes turn to deepest loathing, to stand before her the man accursed, who had destroyed her sister, body and soul, to be revealed to her as he was, he whom she had reckoned as friend, this was what he had sworn to do—this was the scene that enacted itself before his eyes as he stood, his arms folded, steadily looking upwards.

He had vowed a vow once, and had broken it. To just such another trusting, loving girl as this he had vowed, and he had broken it.

Whither were his thoughts leading him? He pulled himself together, tried to take a fresh grasp of his wandering wits, leant his back against a tree, and resumed his stare at the sky.

Whose voice was it that had said to him, and that not so very long ago, "No matter what the time may be, whether by day or night, you have only to say to me, 'Come!' and I will follow you, if needs be, to the world's end?"

Mignon had said it, and Mignon . . . . loved him. Was he falling asleep or dreaming? How bitter cold the night was, how eerie and wild the wind! And as a man dreams, and wakens, and falls asleep again to dream differently, he found himself reviewing his position from the point of view that would be taken of it by any average man of the world. He had sinned, as had others; he had been unfortunate as few men ever are. He had been undone by an accident—by the accident that had made two women sisters; but was that his fault, and was he never to know peace or happiness again because Fate had served him so ill a turn?

Still regarding the matter strictly with the eyes of another man, he called shame upon himself for a Quixotic fool, laughing long and loud as the absurdity of his own qualms and scruples struck him, and his laughter, travelling far abroad on the night air, startled and sobered him, starting his thoughts off on a new track.

Her husband, this paltry, pitiful fellow who left her alone while he amused himself

at a distance, what consideration did he deserve at Mignon's hands or at . . . . *his?*

He had stolen her, this man, like a thief in the night, but he could not keep what he had obtained, or win her heart, and was it not his own fault if that same heart went out to another, who would know how to value and guard it better?

She had never cared for the man whom she had married . . . . was not his own face wet with her tears when he awakened from that deathly swoon upon her wedding morning, nay, might she not have loved him even then, although she had given her vows to Adam?

His mood changed, a wild delirious gladness burned in his veins, that for a time intoxicatd him . . . . come what might, let the future hold what store of wretchedness it would, this one night was his; for this one hour, though snatched from him the next, Mignon's love, the first, the only love that she had ever given to man, belonged neither to her husband nor to any other man living, but *to him.*

For to-night, only to-night! Yet a thing

that is once bestowed is bestowed for ever: nor powers of heaven nor hell can destroy or take away the fact that it once has been.

Then began the dark hour of his temptation, then the fiercest, supremest temptation of his life assailed him, and there raged within him a mortal battle between the devils that so long had had possession of him, and the good angel whose pinions were as yet so weak, and whose promptings he had ever found so hard and difficult to follow, that many times his feeble feet had faltered, and he had groaned and sweated as he sought to pursue the toilsome path she pointed out to him.

And since the good within him was as yet so faint of life, while the evil had grown with his growth, strengthened with his strength, one would have said that the chances were small but that the evil would win the day.

It is always the strongest natures that sin the most deeply, even as under other circumstances they attain to heights of virtue that they of smaller, feeble mould never reach; and if the minds of the latter be so gently and evenly balanced as to be incapable of a crime,

they are oftener than not also incapable of anything truly great. "Effeminacy and wickedness were correlative terms in the Greek and Latin, as were courage and virtue," says Landor. And De Maistre remarks that "ce fut avec une profonde sagesse que les Romains appellèrent du même nom la *force* et la *vertu*. Il n'y a eu effet point de vertu proprement dite, sans victoire sur nous-mêmes; et tout ce qui ne nous coûte rien, ne vaut rien." Do we not now and again witness, side by side with instances of the most startling depravity, a noble deed, an heroic instance of self-sacrifice, that we might look for in vain from a man or woman who has never flagrantly sinned at all?

Let no man dare to pry into the secrets of another man's heart, or seek to gauge it by his own. Different natures have different standards of right and wrong, and cannot be judged the one by the other.

All that night Philip La Mert wrestled with the tempter; all night the battle raged, of which the issue grew each moment more doubtful, until daybreak came, when, drenched

with night-dews, he returned to his home, flung himself upon his bed, and far into the day slept the deathly, profound sleep of utter exhaustion.

* * * * *

"Are you expecting any one this evening, may I ask?" inquired Flora, glancing up from her novel at Mignon, who had been flitting about the room, looking alternately at the window, the clock, and the door, seemingly possessed by a demon of restlessness and excitement.

"Perhaps," said Mignon absently, and putting on her little cloak as she spoke. "Hark! did you not think you heard the sound of wheels?"

"I hear nothing but the wind," said Flora placidly; "who would be likely to be coming here at this time of night?"

"Have you ever felt," said the girl, approaching Flora and her comfortable *entourage* of reading-lamp, fruit, and coffee, "that something out of the common was going to happen to you; that steps were coming nearer and nearer; that a voice was calling you from a

great way off, that would presently grow clear and distinct, and that though you would give the world to cut short the unbearable period of waiting, you must just patiently wait until whatever it was—*came*?"

"*No*," said Flora, withdrawing her hand from the little burning one that Mignon had just laid upon its coolness, "I can't say I ever have, neither do I remember hearing of any one but you who did! You are feverish, my dear, and the sooner you go home and to bed the better!"

"I am going," said the girl, in a somewhat calmer tone; then, much to that young matron's astonishment, she stooped and pressed her lips for about the second time in her life against Flora's peach-like cheek. "Good-night!"

"Oh! good-night," said Flora, who was not used to making formal greetings or farewells to her family. "Why, one would think you were making your last dying deposition, to judge by your countenance! I suppose we shall see you to-morrow morning?"

The girl had reached the door; she turned, the handle in her grasp.

"I suppose so," she said, "unless . . . ." She went away without finishing the sentence, as was remembered—after.

* * * * *

The moon has washed one-half of the world all over with liquid pearl; it has made broad shining walks of dull and ignoble places, and it has dignified into beauty the homely old garden in which Mignon restlessly paces to and fro, backwards and forwards, her every nerve and pulse strung to highest pitch of expectation—expectation of she knows not what, yet which some unerring instinct tells her is making its way to her through the night!

She starts at her own shadow that follows her, black and long, in every devious twist and turn that she takes.

Hark! what is that sound that comes nearer and nearer, that rings so loudly in her ears that it beats on them as blows upon iron; what is that sharp beat of horses' hoofs that seems to fill the air with their thunder, and to outrace the mad beating of a heart that gallops even as they?

They draw nigh, they slacken, they stop altogether. And does not her heart stand still also, and can she not feel the hot breath of the horses on her cheek, as though they were one yard, not a hundred, away?

Some one has arrived, some one is coming; his hurrying steps have passed the outer garden, they have crossed the threshold of the door that divides it from the other, they are *here* . . . .

She takes a step forward, looks, shrinks back, the next moment her hands are caught in Philip La Mert's, and, as face to face they stand in the moonlight, he utters but three words: "*Come, Mignon, come!*"

"Where is Prue?" cries her mistress, entering hastily from the garden, her blue eyes blank and dull, her face white as the dead. Alas! at this turning-point of her little mistress's destiny Prue is absent; not once in a month is she from home at this hour, but to-night she is absent!

"I cannot wait," said the girl, wringing her hands; "but when she comes back tell

her that I have gone with Mr. La Mert, and that I will let her know where she is to come to me, that I will write— "

And then, as though every moment were of pure gold, she ran down the steps, like one possessed, as the woman afterwards said, and so to the carriage that stood without, plainly visible in the moonlight, its lamps mocked and put out by those brighter beacons that shone above.

Servants were running briskly to and fro, the door of the coach was already open, the girl sprang quickly in, Mr. La Mert took his place beside her, the man shut the door to with a bang, then quick as lightning sprang to his place by the coachman's side; the latter touched his horses, they stretched fleetly out into a gallop, another moment and all have vanished, and the woman is left on the doorstep staring after them, and asking herself is she dreaming, or was there ever such a miraculous moonlight flitting seen upon earth as *this* one before?

END OF BOOK II.

BOOK III.

HEART.

CHAPTER I.

"He entered in his house, his home no more,
For without hearts there is no home,
And felt the solitude of passing his own door
Without a welcome."

A YOUNG man came springing up, three at a time, the steps that led to his home, looking as handsome, healthy, and happy as bountiful fresh air, sunshine, and three weeks of outdoor life could make him. The tone had returned to his nerves, the stoutness to his heart, he had flung all his morbid doubts and fears overboard, and was ready, ay, and determined

to make a good fight for his own, and it should go hard with him, he thought, if he did not obtain it.

A pleasant thrill of excitement and masterfulness (for he possessed just then that feeling or quality almost impossible to describe, that usually guides men straight to success) quickened his pulses as he noiselessly inserted his latchkey and crossed his own threshold.

It had been his fancy to come upon Mignon thus, unlooked for, unannounced, and now he wondered to himself how he should find her—talking to Prue, or struggling with the butcher's book, or perhaps, who could tell? actually engaged in writing to him the letter that he had been half-expecting ever since he had gone away from her.

It was not yet dusk, there was plenty of light yet by which to find her, and so thinking, he softly pushed open the drawing-room door and looked around. No, she was not there, for the litter that usually marked her track was conspicuous by its absence; her very work-box was shut (he never remem-

bered seeing it closed before), and set severely against the wall, while the chairs, the piano, the very books had that drearily *unused* look that a room left to itself so quickly assumes.

He went into the dining-room; that too was empty, and preternaturally neat.

She must be in her bedroom; he walked upstairs, then, resolved to begin as he meant to go on, he first knocked at her door, and, receiving no reply, boldly entered.

Surely a very demon of order had entered into his little Mignon during his absence, for here as below, there was not the smallest token of her presence, not so much as a ribbon, a trinket, or a glove; nay, the very flowers on the mantelpiece drooped for lack of air and water, and the groundsel in her bullfinch's cage was dry and withered.

Can any one fix the precise moment in which is borne in upon him the conviction (before it is possible that proof can have come to him) that a terrible misfortune has befallen him?

To his dying day Adam could not have told whether his first foreboding of evil came

to him as he looked at the drooping flowers or at the neglected cage, but most assuredly it was in his heart as he crossed the room to his wife's dressing-table . . . . it fulfilled itself as, looking downwards, he saw on the centre of the china tray before him a plain gold wedding-ring. He stood for a few seconds looking at it without stirring, then he lifted the tiny circlet, and fitted it on the first joint of his little finger. Yes, there could be no mistake about it, it was the ring that he had placed upon Mignon's hand nigh upon four months ago.

"At her old careless tricks again," he said aloud; but his voice sounded strange even in his own ears, then he slowly and carefully put the ring away in his breast-pocket and went downstairs.

He met no one by the way, every one seemed to be asleep or absent, opened the hall-door and passed out into the garden. He would find her there of course, or, if not there, with Flora and the children. And—and what ailed him, that he shivered as though with cold as he went?

The dusk had fallen rapidly that night. As he entered the inner garden he could not distinctly make out distant objects, but nevertheless instinct rather than eyesight informed him that somebody besides himself was present, that Mignon's chair was occupied, and by whom should this be but Mignon's self?

What a fool he had been, he said to himself, as he went forward; nevertheless, I think that the shadow of his doom was upon him, and that he knew it, as he traversed those few steps, and that he would have found Mignon there with more wonder than that which he really did discover.

Was that huddled-up mass that crouched upon the ground, burying its face in the seat of the old wooden chair, that writhed and twisted, and rocked itself to and fro, like a poor dumb creature to whom the unutterable relief of expression of its agony is denied—Mignon?

Adam shivered no longer, but something, and I think it was the best part of his youth, and perhaps of his life, died out of him for

ever as he stood looking down upon the woman. Something had happened, something had come to his little sweetheart in his absence, but—what? He stooped, laid his hand upon Prue's arm, but as though his touch were something expected, yet horribly dreaded, she started, swerved violently away from it, but neither spoke nor turned.

"Where is your mistress?" he said.

But the woman only shrank farther away from him, her arms released their hold of the chair, she lay almost at his feet, a dumb, uncertain outline.

"She is dead," he said, shaking her by the arm, for what but the last, the extremest calamity that could befall her mistress would have power to affect Prue thus? A strong shudder passed through the woman's body; she seemed to gather herself together by a supreme effort, rose, and stood before her master.

"And if 'twas *that* I'd got to tell you," she said hoarsely, "then 'tis a happy woman I should be this night, reckoned

with what I am now, for oh! master . . . master . . ."

No need for him to ask another question; no need for him to ask who was the instrument of his degradation . . . in a flash of time he understood, acknowledged, accepted the situation.

"When did she go?" he said calmly.

"Yester eve."

"She went—alone?"

"Oh! poor Miss Mignon—poor Miss Mignon!" said the woman, "my poor bit little mistress, that was never quite like other folks, she went because she was *fetched*, but what breaks my heart is, she seemed to go as . . . as if she was willin' . . . with him as she never fancied when she was free to fancy him, but always seemed to like other folks so much better . . ."

"He came for her," said Adam; "he fetched her from here—from my house?"

"He came," said Prue, lifting her haggard face to the sky, "at about nine of the clock, in his own coach, and with his own horses and servants, and he must have gone to her

straight in the garden, for Dorothy, who was looking out, says the coach had but scarce stopped, when Miss Mignon come in from the garden calling out for me, and, said she, 'Tell her I couldn't stop, but I'm gone away with Mr. La Mert, and I'll write to her or send . . .' and with that she ran down the steps, and before you could count ten, says Dorothy, they was gone. . . . and I come back half an hour afterwards."

So the whole thing was premeditated, she was dressed and waiting for her lover, while she had already removed and placed in a conspicuous place her wedding-ring, leaving it to tell its own story.

"Only half an hour . . . ." said Prue, wringing her hands, "and if I'd ha' been here she never would have gone, I'd have clung to her, followed her, but go with that black-hearted villain she never should. . . . You got my telegram this morn, sir?"

"No, I started at daybreak. How often has that man visited here in my absence?"

"Till last night," said Prue, "he never come inside the gates; I'd no cause to misdoubt me

that something was wrong, though she've been restless and strange-like in her ways, never keeping five minutes to one thing, and asking me odd questions like, of love and sich, and there'd come sich a beautiful colour into her cheeks, and at last she seemed to get downright happy, jest as she used to be, for, oh! master—master—I guessed 'twas because her thoughts was full of *you*, and jest in watching her I got nigh as happy as she was."

"And while you played in this fool's paradise," he said, with a sudden leap of stern fury in his voice that made her cower before him, "your mistress was drifting to her destruction. What opportunities would she have had of meeting this man but for your wanton disregard of your duty, and why did not you, who are well acquainted with the character of this man, at once inform me of his presence here?"

"I never knew it," said Prue, sadly; "p'r'aps she was afraid I'd tell you; and she were never out alone, unless may be once or twice with the children. 'Twas at Mrs. Dundas's they met."

"At Mrs. Dundas's?" repeated Adam, recoiling as though from a blow, and then he knew that the instinct that had warned him to keep his wife from Flora's society had been a true one, and he cursed himself for the folly that had left her dependent upon it. At his sister's house had Mignon met this man, at his sister's hands would he require her.

He turned and left Prue without another word; he would deal with her later.

Flora, whose attention had never in the whole course of her life been distracted from herself for so long a period before, had by this time got over the feelings of disgust, amazement, and anger produced in her by the news of Mignon's elopement, and was now settling down again into the normal state of affectionate regard for her own self and comforts that was her one abiding characteristic.

Therefore, as she sate buried in the depths of a favourite easy-chair, drawn close to a blazing wood fire, her slippered feet resting on a fender stool, and a new novel in her hand, she looked, with the pleasant back

ground of the gaily-lit, flower-scented room, the very picture of ease and comfort.

Into this quiet interior of light, fragrance, and luxury there strode, without announcement of any kind, the tall figure of her brother.

Flora laid her book down and looked up. Now was her hour of triumph; now was her opportunity for richly revenging herself upon him for the many slights he had offered her, for the many wounds he had given to her vanity, for the superior airs he had been pleased to assume, and the cold, steady disapprobation of herself and her ways that he had so invariably displayed.

Nevertheless, as she looked at him, there was that in his face which made her colour fade, her eyes sink, nay, her very heart beat with sick apprehension, as crossing over to her he bent that terrible face to hers, and grasping her wrist, said in even, quiet tones:

"I have come to you for my wife. She was left in your charge; at your hands I require her. Where is she?"

For a moment Flora believed that he did not yet know the truth; then, the unpleasant-

ness of the task before her arousing her resentment, and some of her hardihood returning, "Am I your wife's keeper?" she said, then quailed again before him, and for the space of a brief moment, forgot herself.

For the first time the possibility that this elopement might be anything but a folly, an error of judgment, on the part of the prime movers in it, that it might mean worse than death to a strong man's heart, came home to her as she looked in her brother's face, and, for the first time in her life, *regarded* him. He was but a savage, but he had something that she herself lacked, that she could not have compassed for untold gold, and for a brief moment her paltry nature forgot itself—and understood.

"She went of her own free will," she said, speaking nothing but nakedest truths, beneath the force of those compelling eyes, that compelling grasp; "so far as I know she never saw him but three times, twice in my presence, once out of it; nevertheless, when he asked her to go, *she went.*"

For a moment Adam's grasp slackened on

Flora's wrist, for a moment the stern hunger of the righteous seeker for his own, wavered in his eyes, then his hold strengthened, his voice grew hard. "And knowing what had gone before, what this man had been to her," he said, "you anticipated no evil from their meeting?"

"*Knowing what had gone before?*" repeated Flora, in tones of purest, most unmistakable amazement. "Why, they never met, to my knowledge, more than three times in their lives! Once at Hampton Court, where I introduced them to each other; once here, on a Sunday afternoon; and once when she was out with Colin and Floss, the day before they ran away!"

"And you did not know," said Adam, "that he had formerly been her lover, that it was at one time uncertain whether she became his wife, not mine?"

Flora withdrew her head, as far as she was able, and looked at her brother with utter dumbfoundered amazement. Here was no acting, as Adam knew; this astute woman, who thought herself a match for most people,

was taken altogether at a disadvantage, had been derided, made a gull of, by a schoolgirl.

"Why, I *introduced* them to each other," she said at last; "I told her his whole story from beginning to end, and she never said a word, not one single word, of any previous acquaintance! And I thought her such a little fool," she added, half aloud, "utterly incapable of concealing a thought from anybody!"

"She told you nothing?" said Adam, the studied deceit displayed by Mignon revealing itself more and more clearly at every step he took in his investigations.

"She never uttered one syllable," said Flora decisively, "to lead me to believe that she had ever spoken to him in her life until we met him in Bushey Park, the morning you went away. Her behaviour to him then struck me as being very strange, for I heard her, twice over, begging him to take her to remote parts of the grounds, but in both instances he refused; and indeed, from the little I have seen of the affair, I should be far more inclined to think that Mignon has

run away with Mr. La Mert, than Mr. La Mert with Mignon!"

"She seemed to like him—to be attracted by him?" said Adam, calmly.

"She never gave him a moment's peace," said Flora with conviction, and still speaking truth according to her lights; "when he called here that Sunday afternoon, she managed, unknown to me, to entertain him for over an hour before I knew he was in the house—indeed, I have good reason to believe that she actually opened the door to him on that occasion so that I should not hear him come in."

Adam had relinquished his grasp of Mrs. Dundas's wrist, and with her left hand she was quietly chafing it.

"He did not call again," she continued, "and Mignon grew so restless and out of sorts, that nothing on earth seemed to keep her quiet. 'Do you think he will come *soon?*' she used to say; and when I said no, I thought he had gone away, she seemed miserable. She took Colin and Floss out for a walk the day before yesterday, and it seems

(from my cross-examination of the children to-day) met some one who walked with her all the way, and the description of whose appearance exactly tallies with that of Mr. La Mert. She came here yesterday about eight o'clock, but seemed very restless, and, on her wishing me good-night, I asked her if she were expecting anybody. She said 'Perhaps.' I then asked if I should see her as usual this morning. She said, 'Yes, unless . . . .' and never finished the sentence. It seems she went upstairs and kissed Floss over and over again, and the next I heard of her was Prue coming round, mad with fear and sorrow, saying that Mr. La Mert had taken her away. Now, judging by after events, the only reasonable supposition is, that the elopement was planned and arranged during that walk yesterday afternoon."

So far, Flora had spoken truth, and Adam, in spite of his prejudices, had believed her. But now something of the outraged vanity of the woman who had been hoodwinked and deceived displayed itself.

"He never admired her," she said; "he

preferred something more *formed*, more fascinating. He will weary of her as he has wearied of all the rest, and, though he is perfectly free, we can scarcely hope that there will be so respectable an issue to the affair as that he will marry her!"

"*Marry her!*" said Adam, who stood rigid, motionless, a grim figure in the midst of the pretty fripperies of the room; then he lifted his clenched right hand to heaven, his lips moved, he was registering an oath on high.

"She shall never be wife to two men," he said, "his blood or mine, for on God's earth we two breathe not together . . . ." and Flora looked, and saw upon his face the look that they indeed are happy who live and die without beholding—the awful, unappeasable wrath and hunger for the life of another that, justified by the old savage, simple creeds of right and wrong, is sternly righteous and just, that, measured by the new and paltering creed, is—murder.

Flora neither shrank from him nor blenched, nay, in that moment she hotly admired this hitherto contemned brother as she sat,

scarcely daring to breathe, her eyes fixed upon his face.

The shrift of Philip La Mert would be short indeed, she thought, if they were brought face to face while this mood of her brother's lasted.

"Forgive me," he said, "I have wronged you . . . ." then he left her. And, her selfish indifference rudely destroyed, she sat, the blood cold and sluggish in her veins, through the long hours of the night, watching and waiting for she knew not what, listening for sounds she dared not determine, although reason and common sense alike told her that it was not possible that the guilty should be overtaken, or justice administered that night.

CHAPTER II.

"Freeze, freeze, thou bitter sky,
That dost not bite so nigh
As benefits forgot;
Though thou the waters warp,
Thy sting is not so sharp
As friend remembered not."

AT Mr. La Mert's club, the name of which Adam discovered by means of an old Army List, he was so fortunate as to be able to obtain that gentleman's present address. A heavy bribe had somewhat to say to his good luck, also the chance that he had addressed his inquiries to the only person who could possibly have answered them; nevertheless, a fierce throb of satisfaction at this first slight victory over circumstances stirred in his veins as he sped,

as fast as horse's feet could carry him, along the way that he had but newly come. For, on looking down at the direction with which the man had furnished him, it had somewhat surprised him to find that it was a place but two miles distant from Lilytown. So his wife's lover had been living almost at her gates probably ever since her marriage, as doubtless she was aware, therefore manifested no surprise whatever on the occasion of meeting him with Flora in Bushey Park. It had, of a truth, been for him, then, and not for Muriel, that she had refused to leave Rosemary and stayed on there alone : it was that she might have opportunities of meeting this man at her leisure that she had been so anxious for her husband to depart for the Highlands ; it had been from fear of the knowledge being communicated to him that she had kept the fact of his neighbourhood a secret from even Prue ; and it had been the knowledge of his own speedy return that had caused the guilty pair to hasten the arrangements for their flight and carry them out on the very eve of his arrival.

He did not expect to find them at this place —he knew that it was the very last thing likely or possible—but he hoped to get a trace, a clue, that might enable him to commence his pursuit of them in the right direction.

It was close upon midnight when he arrived at one of those low picturesque cottages by the river that seem peculiar to the banks of the Thames.

Not a light was visible in the windows—the household, if any, had evidently retired to rest; repeated and loud knocking, however, presently drew forth a sleepy and reluctant personage, half-dressed, who owned to being the coachman, while his wife, who followed at her leisure, was plainly enough the cook.

Was Mr. La Mert at home?

No, he was not. Master had left the preceding day, or rather night, and they didn't know at all when to expect him back.

He (the coachman) had driven his master to Lilytown the preceding evening?

Certainly, it was his duty to drive Mr. La

Mert when he used his carriage, which wasn't once in three months.

Where had he driven him after going to Lilytown ?

That was *his* business. (Hesitation, consequent on a meeting of palms.) Well, master hadn't given no orders to him to hold his tongue, and there wasn't much to tell. After taking up a young lady at Rosemary, he'd drove to Brentford Station, and then he got his orders to go home, which he did. Mr. Coles, Mr. La Mert's man, had accompanied them as far as Brentford, and had returned with himself home.

Mr. Montrose would like to see Mr. Coles? This somewhat doubtfully ; he (the coachman) would do his best, but Mr. Coles did not like being disturbed, and he was not in the best of tempers—and would Mr. Montrose come in and wait while he went upstairs ?

No, Mr. Montrose would not wait within, but stood without, apparently as patient as the steaming horse, or the driver who, with arms folded on the top of his hansom, slept with one eye and ear open.

It was a long while before Mr. Coles appeared, elegantly arrayed, his whole manner and air indicative of immense disgust at being disturbed in his slumbers at such an hour.

He was not without an inkling of the state of the case, but whereas in all previous affairs of the kind his master had treated him with a certain contemptuous confidence, leaving all minor details to him for arrangement, in *this* instance the confidential servant was as much in the dark as everybody else, and he resented the lack of information very keenly. For the first time during the ten years he had served Mr. La Mert, that gentleman had elected to manage his own affairs, absolutely to depart on a journey without him, and the vanity and the heart of Mr. Coles were alike insulted and wounded.

He was at first in doubt as to whether another outraged husband stood before him; he had seen a good many first and last, and knew the manner, the look, even the voice, by heart. There was something unusual about this one, and Mr. Coles felt his languid curiosity to be quickened.

He could give no further information than the coachman had done. Luggage? His master had taken none. And then, utterly baffled, Adam had asked himself, Were they all in a conspiracy to deceive him, and did they withhold from him some knowledge that would make of his vengeance a sure and swift certainty, instead of leaving him, blindly groping hither and thither, a giant bound by withies, the forces that should hew down and destroy poured out like water in the utter negation of impotent helplessness?

No; these people were probably speaking truth. Was it likely that their master would wilfully set the pursuer on his track? But as he drove rapidly away, his clenched hand, all gashed and bleeding with the force with which it struck the iron before him, he asked himself what should be his next step in this thing? He must think, he must plot, he must contrive, when he was conscious of but one raging thirst, of but one headlong impulse, the thirst to slay, the madness to overtake, the crying requisition of body and soul that he should come face to face with this man, who had

taken his hand in friendship, who in the sight of God had vowed the blackest, most damnable lie that liar ever took between his lips; to find him *now*, with this wicked delirium strong upon him, with hand, heart, purpose, all willing and set to the same deed . . . . not later, when they had cooled by reflection or aged by time, but *now*.

He lifted his bleak face to heaven and cried aloud that this craving of his heart was good and righteous in God's eyes, and that he would not dare lift his head again among his fellows if this thing came to his hand and he refrained from it—refrained from crushing the breath out of this man accursed, whose life had been the scythe before which fell the sweetest, fairest flowers of youth and innocence, who existed but to destroy, to pollute, and to deface, knowing neither ruth nor pity, and even defying all instincts of nature in his pursuit of the object of his passion; for might not the heart of a devil, thought Adam, have been satisfied with the ruin of the one girl without accomplishing that of the other young sister-life also?

The morning was early yet when he reached Scotland Yard, and placed in the hands of the authorities such information as might lead to the tracing of the steps of the missing pair.

Having communicated all that was necessary, and given a written description of the personal appearance of both lady and gentleman, he proceeded to ask a few questions.

When might news of them be expected? What place would be the likeliest in which to seek them—the Continent or beyond?

And then his hand had involuntarily closed, and the inspector looking up keenly at this calm young man, whose flaming eyes seemed the only living thing about him, decided that this was the husband, not the brother, as he had at first supposed, judging by the age given of the young lady.

"They have had time to get out of the country," said the inspector; "in all probability they have safely reached the Continent by now, but by noon to-day (since your instructions are so liberal) inquiry will be on their track; and looking to the peculiar cir-

cumstances of the case, the youth of the lady, the fact that they are without luggage, and one or two minor things you have mentioned, I should say that we shall in all probability have news of some kind for you to-morrow. Your present address?"

"I leave England to-morrow morning," said Adam, "to pursue this search myself. You will send any information you may acquire to me wherever I may be."

"You actually meditate such a wild-goose chase?" said the inspector calmly; "then let me tell you, sir, that you err. You can do nothing. You run a strong chance of missing valuable information that might enable you to overtake them, and you have about as much chance of finding them as if, to use a homely comparison, you looked for a needle in a bundle of hay. If you will remain close by, within almost instant reach of news, you will then have some reasonable chance of success. There is absolutely nothing for you to do but to wait."

To wait! To sit calmly down, for days, perhaps weeks, with this lust of hatred burn-

ing out his heart, this undying hunger eating his life away, to wait . . . . while they two went their way, unhindered, unlet . . . . He stood perfectly still, a short, desperate battle between passion and reason going forward in his mind; then his stiff hand relaxed, his bent brows straightened.

"I will wait," he said calmly; and nothing proved the gigantic strength of this man more than those three simple words, that with his blood boiling within him, with each muscle, nerve, and vein strung to extremest tension of action, he could elect to calmly sit down—and wait.

To wait until a messenger should come to him, when he would rise up and go his way, and do that which he had set to his own right hand, neither hasting nor faltering, but knowing what would be at the end of his journey—and prepared.

* * * * *

All that day he sat alone in his deserted house, and none came to, or disturbed him, for none durst, until night fell, and brought to him—Colin.

What comfort could this poor fellow offer, what words of healing could he speak, to a man who uttered no railings against Heaven, spoke no word of complaint, but just sat grimly waiting there until the summons should come that would take him straight into the presence of his wife's destroyer?

The simple words of love and sorrow that he had been about to speak died upon his lips; in the intensity of this man's absorption Colin felt himself to be blotted out and swept aside, and not possessing the presumption of those little souls who are abashed at nothing, he was fain to stand silent, though perhaps that unspoken language of love which can convey itself without words unconsciously reached and soothed the lonely, stricken heart of the silent watcher.

Importuned and wearied by Flora to take her away out of all this wretchedness and discomfort, for the breath of tragedy sickened her small soul, and she was really afraid of what Adam might do in his haste, she carried her point so far that on the next morning but one the Dundases set out for Glen-luce.

"For God's sake," Adam had said when his hand met Colin's in a farewell grasp, "keep my father away—and don't come back, old fellow; you can't help me, no one can do any good"—and then the two men had looked hard in each other's faces, as not knowing how long a farewell they might be taking of each other, and Adam was left in unbroken silence till the end.

At intervals food was brought and set before him; it remained for the most part untouched, but now and again he took and ate sparingly, as one who knows that all his strength will be required in the days that are coming.

Prue ventured not into his presence, the weight of his unspoken condemnation lay heavy upon her; yet keener even yet was her sense of personal loss, and, like a lioness robbed of her whelps, she wandered up and down the house and garden, resting neither by night nor day, fiercely longing to set out in search of her mistress, yet held inactive by the same inexorable necessity that rendered her master powerless, looking out

with eyes weary through watching, for the letter or message that her little mistress had promised with her parting words to send.

It seemed to be the girl's unhappy lot to age and wither all those who loved her best, and this poor faithful serving-woman lost all her comely look of second youth, and grew quite grey and middle-aged, in the days that followed immediately on Mignon's departure.

All through the long hours of the day and night the master sat, moving neither hand nor foot, and waited, and endured.

There are men who, when a great calamity overtakes them, are able in a measure to pass it off in philippics against fate, in fury against the cause of their punishment, in loud-voiced floods of lamentation, that washes away a large portion of the burden imposed upon them; there are others who make no effort to shift or remove it, who, whether it crush them or no, accept it in all its utter dead weight, and, sitting passively down, endure it. And even as there are men that in their hour of supreme agony are capable of receiving comfort and support from the hand

of a friend, so there are others, the mighty of heart and strong of will, who, when God's hand lies heavy upon them, are absolutely alone; into whose intense isolation of soul no man or woman can enter, and to whom the combined sympathy and love of the people they value most on earth is idle and worthless as the breath of summer wind that caresses the summit of a lofty rock.

It was with Adam as with these latter: a curse had fallen upon him from heaven, he desired the help of no man to enable him to bear it; full front he sat down with his ruin and disgrace, and abated no jot of its magnitude to his conscience.

It has been said that "Personality, as the universal characteristic of man, advances to the phenomenal in the form of individuality." Now individuality is prone to get its owner into trouble, since the laws of human nature forbid the exaggeration of any of its characteristics without incurring the penalty of danger.

Thus, Adam's dogged determination, that in its higher form is strength of mind, in its

lower profound and wrong-headed obstinacy, was, backed by his intense individuality, likely to hurry him into the error of arrogating to himself the sole right of the Creator, and of charging his soul with the sin of bloodshed.

A weaker man had been cowed by his punishment; this one rose above and mastered it, nor reckoned his life over because he had gotten a bad blow; rather he dared to look forward to the time when, his vengeance taken, he would map his future out and do good work in it, finding in the fruits of ambition joys even greater than had been denied to him by love.

So he thought in his ignorance, not knowing that as yet between him and his calamity was reared a high wall, that one breath of human pity, one touch of nature sweeping across his soul, should cause to fall in ruins about him. For the shame of this thing that had befallen him had not yet come home to him; the intense, creeping shame of body even more than of mind, that is that man's portion whose wife has dishonoured him in the flesh, had not once run like madness through his

veins; hitherto, indeed, he had not once *thought* of the woman who had betrayed him.

He had spoken of her, he had provided against her, had acknowledged her existence to himself by so doing, but she had not once been consciously present to his mind or eyes.

As an incarnate wrong, as an embodiment of shame, she found part in his outlook; but as the living, breathing, winsome maiden whom he had loved and married, he knew her not, nor would she ever again be before him in the old familiar guise until the death-throes of his love for her were upon him, until he took his last gaze upon her ere closing the coffin-lid of memory upon her for ever.

About the middle of the third day, the purely physical hunger to overtake Philip La Mert that had devoured him departed, his eyes were no longer dim with blood and passion, his pulses beat more slowly, and in his veins the liquid fire slackened, and grew chill; yet now that the fever had left him, that he was able to see with the eyes of reason, his judgment deliberately ratified

the decision at which his heart had arrived. And if the immediate passionate desire for his enemy's life had grown fainter, less urgent, it was but the liquid metal transformed into a hard resisting mass, even more terrible than the other in its solid strength.

If his landscape no longer contained out of all the world but two figures, Philip La Mert's and his own; if he were able to look ahead and see aught but the one picture stamped upon his brain, of they two face to face, with death for the portion of the one or the other, it was not because the picture was any the less sufficiently present to his mind, but because, now that light was returning to his eyes, he was able consecutively to *think*, and thought entailed the starting forward of those shadows of which he had been dimly conscious, into vivid and hateful life.

At the same time he began to observe outward things, recognised the familiar faces of his books—familiar, yet surely absent from his sight for a very long while, and then with a sudden sharp shock that was the beginning of his awakening, he remembered that he had

only been absent from them three weeks that very day.

Only three weeks . . . . half absently he said to himself, with reference to that abstract creation that stood in his mind for Mignon, that she passed quickly through all the great crises of her life, and that she had apparently found it just as natural to fall into sin at the first opportunity she got, as she had previously found it easy to marry at a moment's notice the man who had come forward to protect her. His thoughts straying towards her were cut short by the entry of letters. During these three days there had come to him a great many, all of which he had flung aside save those from Scotland Yard, and these too, he had, when perused, dashed down with a baulked and utter sense of failure, for let the wording of them be as it might, the gist of each was precisely similar. Not the slightest clue had been obtained to the missing couple, and the matter, that had at the first flash appeared so simple as to call for no special skill or address, was fast resolving itself into a baffling puzzle that absolutely defied solution.

Mr. La Mert and his companion had been traced to Waterloo; beyond that point all was darkness. It was quite certain that they had not left England, and in this, the last bulletin received by Adam, he was informed that there was reason to believe they were still in London, waiting their opportunity to get safely away.

In London! Close to him, within reach of his hand and vengeance, and he idly waiting here—the thought nearly drove him mad, and for a space relit the furnaces of fury in his heart. And yet he knew that to go and search for them in the great Babylon yonder was worse than useless; that skilled searchers were at work; nevertheless he said to himself that but a little longer he would wait, wearing the semblance of a coward's shameful acquiescence in his own disgrace.

To-morrow, ay, to-morrow, he would rise up, and, no matter how great the folly and uselessness of it, he would himself assist in the prosecution of the search.

It was one of those bright, early October afternoons, when life seems at its keenest and

brightest, when the sun's rays strike one with a sense of tingling and warmth, when the air heartens and freshens body and soul, and every leaf, and twig, and late-tarrying flower stands out vivid and distinct as though our eyes have suddenly grown clearer, and the world in which we walk has been hitherto looked at by us through spectacles. But Adam, who was usually so quick to note and comprehend each one of Nature's moods, heeded her not to-day; he could not have told whether the day were fair or foul, and yet it was to affect him; for as he sat, fixedly staring at the books and mass of papers before him, a sudden shaft of sunshine pierced between the drawn-down blind and the window, and lit upon and burnished the edges of some shining object among the dusty heap before him.

Mechanically he leaned forward to see what it was, and, stretching out his hand, he lifted the glittering thing and held it before his eyes.

It was only Mignon's little thimble that he had seen on her slender finger so many, many times, as it flitted over her needle-work, or, oftener still, remained in mid-air while she

talked. Only a little old battered thimble; but the homely familiar thing did that which nothing else had had power to do—it brought the living Mignon up before him, and for the space of a moment he saw her, not as the guilty accomplice of an unlawful lover, but as the merry, mad, lovely little hoyden who had ridden in her wheelbarrow with such wild glee, who had eaten his cherries, taught him English history, presented him with half-a-crown, and three weeks ago, in gentle token that, though she did not love, her heart was full of kindness for him, thrust into his hand a tiny knot of flowers. He took from his breast-pocket a minute package, then from another pocket he drew a second, and a third, and proceeded to unfold them. The first contained what had been a small bunch of flowers, the other a plain gold wedding-ring, the third a bright new half-crown. These he laid side by side, and for some seconds sat looking at all three.

Then for the first time it all came home to him—all the shame, the sin, the loss, and last, and greatest of all, the pity of it.

The mists of passion and revenge no longer obscured his vision, the veil that had for a time been mercifully drawn between him and his calamity was torn asunder. Now was the hour of his weakness and suffering to begin, and before it he fell, helpless and unresisting as a child.

He neither abased his head nor stirred, but sat staring straight before him at the half-crown, the ring, the withered flowers, in his eyes the strained agonised look that in a man out-weighs in its piteousness all the rivers of tears that have ever been shed by women. Hitherto he could not truly be said to have suffered. The first stunning blow of misfortune had been so instantly excluded by the overmastering longing for revenge, that his own sense of personal bereavement had been in abeyance; but now in the flesh he suffered, although possibly not in the same degree that he would have done had this girl been veritably and truly his wife.

This thing that he had called his own, that had borne his name, shared his home, dwelt by his side, that had been his, yet not his,

that he had so longed after, yet refrained from, that the gift might be all the richer and more perfect when at last it should come to him, had been refrained from for—Philip La Mert. That she might go to this worn-out man of pleasure, this reckless plunderer of the fruit that grew in other men's gardens, as innocent and pure as an unwed maiden—yea, for the greater triumph and delight of this man—he had forborne.

In name, at least, she had once been his; she was now Philip's . . . . the first fact had been washed out in the last, which was eternal; for come what would, happen to Philip what might, she could never, though both dragged out their lives for a hundred years, be anything to *him* again.

He might slay this man who had betrayed her. Ay! but would that give back to him his lost Mignon? Would it make white her robes again, or restore to her so much as the shadow of that which had departed from her?

He might punish, but he could not undo; he might destroy, but he could not create; all the vengeance on earth could not make

whole that which was broken, or make void the terrible deed that Mignon, not knowing, had committed.

For she knew not that Philip, the last, the most fatal, of all men upon earth that she should have loved, was he to whom was owing the ruin of her sister's young life, and when she awakened to that knowledge, as all too surely she must awaken some day, whither would she turn, and what would become of her in her extremity, since she had no friend in the wide world to whom she could turn, save him that she had outraged and forsaken? Surely, surely she would come creeping homeward to the only home she had ever known, as do all spent and wounded creatures—to die?

For it was only a question of time and accident; nay, when this man wearied of her, as he had wearied of all the rest, might he not tell her the truth with his own lips, and so rid himself of her in a moment?

Still gazing before him, as the shadows fell in the quiet room, and the books before him grew faint and indistinct, he seemed to see

this Mignon, a lonely and pathetic figure, unconscious and innocent even in her ruin, wandering, as a child may, into peril, smiling, unsuspecting, happy, until the great gates of sin clanged heavily behind her, and she awoke by slow degrees to the consciousness of the thing that she had done.

Muriel's chance of salvation, Philip's one hope of self-respect and reformation, his own strong life and hopes—among these the girl had lightly moved, shattering all, herself the only unconscious actor in the tragedy. O! God help her, when her awakening should come . . . . when the mists fell from her childish soul and eyes; when she discovered that by her own act she had consigned to never-ending shame the sister she had so deeply and wildly loved that their two hearts had seemed to make but one between them!

It was quite dark now, but as in letters of fire written before him he read his own self-condemnation, and hearkened to the stern reproof spoken by his conscience. Bad as this thing was, said his mentor, was it not of his own doing? Had he not taken advantage

of this girl's inexperience and forlorn position to surprise her into the false step of becoming his wife, leaving her not a moment in which to take counsel of her heart or learn her own mind, and when he had obtained her, instead of carefully watching over, and protecting her (aware as he was of her girlish fancy for Mr. La Mert), had he not deliberately left her, without one word of warning, exposed to the temptations and wiles of a man whose life had been spent in the practice of beguiling foolish women's hearts from them?

She was but a child; she ought to have been cared for as such; he should have been gentle with her, instead of which he had been harsh, even violent, scaring her into that refuge of all weak creatures—deceit, and driving her to repose herself, when the opportunity arose, upon one whose love seemed to assure to her love and protection. And yet this deceit, this palpable premeditation on her part of the whole affair, did not tally well with his conception of her innocence and transparent simplicity of character.

Her absolute silence to Flora on the subject

of her previous acquaintance with this man, her meeting with him on the very morning of his own departure, her interview alone with him when he came to the house, her subsequent walk, and the fact that she knew her husband might return any day, and that therefore the time for action was short—did not all these circumstances point to the conclusion that she had all along nourished a secret guilty feeling for her former lover, and that his arrival upon the scene had only been the light set to the torch that had long been in waiting for the burning touch ?

Nay, if Flora spoke truth, she had deliberately sought out and striven to attract this man to her own misdoing ; with the untutored instinct of a child, she had looked, longed for, and stretched out her hand for the forbidden fruit, heedless of all so that she grasped it securely.

After all, had he erred in the reading of her character, and was the innocence for which he had loved her but sheer silliness and folly, the simplicity of heart that he had so often in his thoughts designated by the old Scotch term

of "æfaldness" but pure stupidity and ignorance? The love-letter that she had written with such eager haste to Mr. La Mert, in reply to his own—might not the impulse that prompted her to such speed have taken its birth in a spirit of nascent coquetry, and were the words of Silas Sorel but true words after all?

Then if it were so, if he had misread her from first to last, if that upon which he had poured out his whole love was but a dream-woman created by his fancy, while the reality was this poor and miserable thing, then he should surely thank God with all his heart and soul that he was rid of her, that the first-comer should have been the touchstone to test her lightness or her purity, and so rid him of her for ever . . . . and yet . . . . and yet . . . . her face rising up before him, as he remembered it last, pure and child-like as it had looked to him in her slumbers, shamed him in his thoughts, and sent them slinking out of sight as though they had been incarnate lies.

There came into his mind those exquisite lines of one of the good Hare brothers that

had always appeared to him to be written for, to exactly typify, Mignon, that had seemed to explain her character so well, since he, better than any else, knew of the intense powers of devotion and love that underlay her simple exterior.

"Leaves are light and useless, and idle and wavering and changeable, they even dance, yet God has made them part of the oak. In so doing He has given us a lesson not to deny the stout-heartedness within, because we see the lightsomeness without."

He had watched her growing up, he had jealously hearkened to her every word, because he knew how often the fairest face is belied by the black heart within, and from first to last he had found her a school-girl indeed, and over-young for her years, but emphatically "without guile." He had even fancied he saw growing up in her one by one the delicate blossoms of those "seeds of truth which exist naturally in our souls," and he had belisved that the instincts of such an one could not possibly lead her far astray, but that she must inevitably turn towards the light, obeying the voice of her heart.

He had been mistaken . . . . but no, to-night, to-night he would think of her, not as this incredible and frightful thing that she had become, but as he had known her always; to-morrow he would put her out of his thoughts for ever, and she would be as one who had never lived to him, one whom he had never known—for to-night, ay, to-night, she should come to him in her girlish robes of purity and loveliness . . . . all the future was his in which to forget her, to-night he would . . . . remember.

There passed in array before him every kind look she had ever given him, every gentle word that had fallen from her lips, every hue and tint that she had ever worn, and through the silence and darkness of the room he seemed to hear the patter of her little feet coming and going, nay, the very touch of her slender hand crept out of the void and fell upon his like a flower, and once more he felt upon his lips the fleeting kiss that she had so rarely yet so lightly laid upon them.

In this retrospection of Adam was no

maudlin, unhealthy sentiment, or paltry self-pity. It was his last deliberate, conscious regard of that which had once been precious to him, his last backward look ere rising up to go his way, to act his part, whether well or ill, in the battle of life, and henceforth to live, if life were his portion, as though no Mignon had ever existed unto him, as though the folly of love had never found place in his thoughts.

Through the long hours of the night, then, her spirit abode with him, and in that space he lived over again all the bitter-sweet of the past four months, all the longing, the disappointment, the fierce jealousy, the acquiescence in his fate, lastly the renewed hope and courage with which he had returned, resolved to make one last, determined struggle before resigning himself to an ignominious defeat.

It was strange how little of the bitterness that a man usually feels towards the woman who has disgraced him found place in Adam's thoughts. Of the foul ingratitude of her conduct to himself, who had so nobly and generously given her all, to be rewarded

thus, he never thought; his condemnation was all for her betrayer. As well might one scold a child who ventures barefooted on red-hot ploughshares, believing them to be but painted red, as turn the engines of his fury on this creature who had been but an instrument, put to vile uses, of a wicked man's will.

Perhaps it had been his own fault that she did not love him. Somehow, all his life long it had seemed to be his fate to miss love, and save his mother, he could not remember a soul who had ever loved him—stay, there had been one other, but it had been love guessed at, not spoken; moreover, he had not coveted it, and we all have a cruel way of reckoning as no love at all that which we do not care to take. And after Mrs. Montrose had been calmly and politely snubbed out of life by her husband, her son had loved nothing and nobody until he had met Mignon; and although it had been some time before he set his whole heart upon her, and not until he had watched her narrowly at all times and places, he had, his mind once made up, loved her with an intensity, a devotion, and an un-

selfishness that she might have looked for in vain from any other man.

For as yet there was nothing in her to awaken such a passion, although indeed it is true enough that it is not always the people who are most deserving of it who get the best and noblest kind of love, since some of the profoundest passions with which the world has rung have been inspired by a totally inadequate power, a miserably insufficient cause, the real secret being that these famous lovers, whether men or women, have possessed a capacity for love so grand, and deep, and large, as to be able to cover with glory those who have inspired it.

The beauty, the sweetness, the goodness of the person beloved has been but of secondary importance; it is not these that have worked such grand results; the passion, the sublime excellence in loving existed independently, and though outward influences might bring them to the light, even as the sun calls out the colour of flowers, the germs existed in the man or woman's own heart.

And so this poor fellow had given to the

girl all the pent-up love for which he had never found a vent, and he had been rewarded as such men usually are. Nevertheless, love in him existing in its highest, most perfect form, sufficing to itself and absolutely independent of response, he suffered less than if that love had been the selfish passion that passes current with the world as the sacred flame.

For if we go to the root of things, what is love for the most part but a deification of self? The love of a lover . . . . it demands an equivalent, it loves because the loveliness or charm of a woman are grateful to it, they communicate to him a sense of pleasure, therefore he loves the cause. The love of a mother for her child, does she not cherish it because it is hers, a blessing and a delight, that gives to her far more of happiness than she gives to it? If it dies, does she mourn it so passionately because of the little life so rudely swept away, or because she is so intensely conscious of her own personal bereavement? She mourns it thus wildly because the touch of the little lips was joy to her, because the

feeling of ownership and protection of the helpless creature was sweet . . . . in a word, self is largely mingled with the sacredness of all sorrow, and they only can be said to mourn as to love truly, who mourn without any selfish reflection, or who have loved without return.

"Desires absorb; affections give out." All the giving had been on Adam's side, yet was he none the poorer.

As the night wore on, by degrees the image of Mignon, as she had been, faded, and Mignon as she was rose up before him. He had done with his regrets, with his memories; what he now had to do was to look this new woman in the face and recognise her with all her loathsome shame, and treachery, and deceit upon her, to accustom his eyes to her features, her mien, to indelibly imprint her upon his mind, then, then it would be easy enough to root her out of his heart and life, and go his way to do his work in the world as well as if she had never existed. Fool . . . . fool . . . . as though the slow growth of years is capable of being plucked

up in a moment, as though by one supreme effort a man may overcome his ruling passion . . . . rather will he do so by slow degrees, with many falterings, backslidings, and halts by the way, while in proportion to the strength of the nature that it dominates, will be the duration and fierceness of the struggle.

* * * * *

One by one the objects of the room came out before him, in dun, in grey, in chilly shades that made familiar things look ghostly and unreal. One by one the sounds that usher in the daylight made themselves audible to his ears, and his senses came back to every-day life. Mechanically he bent forward to gather up the relics that remained to him of the dream of his manhood. The wedding-ring, the flowers, and the half-crown were there, but what had become of the thimble? He looked at them in bewilderment for some moments, then his clenched right hand relaxed, and to his own surprise he found within it the missing bit of silver. At what period of his agony had he clutched and held fast to it? He could not remember . . . .

but it was unaccountable, because he no longer feared or desired to touch anything that had been hers. The long battle of the night was over, and he had conquered. Henceforth his heart was empty of love (he thought), and let him meet her as soon as he might it would be with absolute indifference. So much for the opinion of a poor mortal who had discovered a royal road to that to which no man has ever discovered a royal road yet.

Then he rose, unbarred the hall-door, and went out into the free air of heaven.

CHAPTER III.

"When Phœbus doth behold
Her silver visage in the wat'ry glass,
Decking with liquid pearl the bladed grass."

THE morning was yet young, and the sky had that marvellous clear intensity that almost pains the eye as one gazes, so pure is it and cold, as though the light were but the sun's messenger, while he himself follows from afar.

How many of us are there who know what these early mornings are, how hushed and still and even solemn, a brief space of breathing-time in which to think, ere the common crowded day claims us for its own?

For the most part, we know them not, no, nor desire to; we prefer sleep; sleep, of

which we shall surely have more than enough when, our brief span of life over, we lie down to a slumber of which the limits are not known.

Something of the old intense love for, and sympathy with, nature, that had from his boyhood made her his true and loving disciple, stirred in Adam as he gazed upwards and abroad; he seemed to have been long away from that familiar friend whose teaching had always seemed to him to be so much sweeter and better than any that came to him from the lives or lips of man. He loved every one of her works, he rejoiced in her every footprint; the nearer he found himself to understanding her, the nearer he had approached his Maker, and the calmer and more steadfast his heart had grown.

"The ways of Nature are the thoughts of Nature, and these are the thoughts of God."

For a while Adam stood and looked around him, then he passed on to the inner garden. He walked slowly round it, pausing when he came to Mignon's chair, and looking upwards at the bunch of wall-flowers that still

flourished in their old place. His eyes next fell on the wheelbarrow, that looked dirty and disconsolate, and harboured a snail or two and some withered leaves.

He had meant to make a thriving, fruitful place of this neglected shabby garden by next spring, while at one end should be the prettiest flower-walk that a lass ever stepped between.

The solitary rose-bush that the garden contained, and that seemed to have got in there by mistake, stood bare and unsightly; it had borne but one rose that summer, and this he had plucked and given to—her.

As he stood before it, there came to his mind a verse of one of the songs of his country:

> "Oft hae I rov'd by bonnie Doon,
> To see the rose and woodbine twine,
> While ilka bird sang o' its love,
> And fondly sae did I o' mine.
> Wi' heartsome glee I pu'd a rose—
> The sweetest on its thorny tree;
> But my fause love has sto'en the rose,
> And left the thorn behind wi' me."

Once more Adam gazed around as may

one who doubts when he will see it all again, then he went slowly away, and re-entered the house.

For two hours he busied himself in his study, sorting and arranging books and papers. and writing certain letters and instructions.

At eight o'clock his breakfast and letters were brought to him. Of the former he ate; the latter, contrary to his rule of the past few days, he opened and began to read without exception. There was no news from Scotland Yard, but he had given up expecting any. He had made up his mind that if this man were to be found, then that he, and he alone, would find him, and he was athirst to be gone on his quest.

"I am sorry," wrote his father, "that you have expressed so decidedly your refusal to see or communicate with any member of your family, and you will pardon my remarking that there is an obduracy in the way you have received this chastening blow of Providence that strikes me as being in the highest degree impious and unbecoming. Instead of viewing the late lamentable occurrence

as you do, you may fairly congratulate yourself on your good fortune in being rid of the extremely forward and improper young person whom, in an impulse of mistaken kindness, you made your wife.

"You will, of course, sue for a divorce immediately, and time and change of scene will doubtless assuage the natural concern you may experience at so very abrupt and disreputable a termination of your first experience of matrimony."

Adam smiled bitterly as he laid the letter down. He knew the thoughts that had been in his father's mind when he penned that letter, as well as if they had been set in black and white before him. Once this luckless, guilty wife were put away, and what was to hinder the long-desired match between the houses of Dundas and McClosky from being brought about?

A divorce . . . Adam laughed again, and even more harshly, at the thought of it. Let this search of his, upon which he was bound, be successful, and there would either be none to sue, or none to respond. Even

if this man escaped his vengeance, were his own hands so clean, his conscience so pure, as to enable him to put her away for what, after all, was mainly due to his own neglect of her?

He rose, went to a bookshelf hard by, took down a volume, and read the following: "The law imposes upon the husband the duty of watching over the society, conduct, and habits of his wife, and holds him answerable for every act aud omission of his that may expose her purity to hazard, or render her the more easy prey to the seducer. . . . A husband is bound to give his wife some superintendence when she is placed in dangerous situations."

He replaced the book, and resumed his seat before the rest of the unopened letters.

Had he not left her exposed to every risk? More than this, had he not omitted to warn her and those around her, against the possible danger she was in from Mr. La Mert? He had given her no superintendence; on the contrary, his very neglect had laid her open to the hazardous situations that had ended in her ruin. And even if he were not to blame,

he still would not sue for a divorce. What! enable the foul traitor to make eternal the link that bound him to his victim, so that he would be furnished with legal authority over her, so that he would even be able to compel her to go back to him, even if she escaped from his side on discovering who and what he was?

That triumph at least Mr. La Mert should not have, and, as he had said to Flora, Mignon should never be wife to two men. He turned to his letters. The next that he opened was in a woman's handwriting, and a somewhat familiar one. For a moment, recognising, yet not knowing it, he drew back, half-thinking that it might be from *her*, with some childish, pitiful plea for forgiveness that would move him to very pity and self-scorn that he could have loved so poor a thing. The next moment he saw that it was from —Phillis.

In all his life before, though he had seen her handwriting many times, he had never received a letter from her. What could she possibly have to say to him now?

"I have dared, at the risk of displeasing you," she said, "to write you one line, to beg of you not to believe this story about your Mignon until you have heard more; there may, there *must* be, some explanation, for if she is all that you told me she was, though she might be heedless and wilful, that she could so deceive you I never will believe .... She may have thought he was taking her to you, or he may have beguiled her by some falsehood; he is a bad man, and she is so young and simple .... only if you believe harm of her, some day you will be bitterly sorry .... and I am, your friend,

"PHILLIS."

His heart failed him a little as he read the simple, romantic, girlish letter .... after all, had he been too hasty, had he condemned his wife unjustly?

But no, reviewing all the circumstances, his momentary doubts faded .... noble, pure-hearted Phillis, who judged all women by herself, how could it be expected that she would understand? *She* would never have so

acted . . . . why had he not loved and wooed her instead of the girl whose weak hands had failed beneath the weight of her husband's honour?

He separated this letter from the rest, and placed it in his breast-pocket. The others he glanced through and destroyed.

At ten o'clock he left the house, and was absent about an hour. On his return he sent for Prue. She came quickly, believing that the morning's post had at last brought news of her mistress; but her hopes fell at the sight of her master's face.

"Prue," he said, "I am leaving here to-day, and before my departure it is necessary that certain directions should be given and arrangements made."

"You're going away, sir?" she said, twisting her fingers restlessly together; "and won't you take me with you, since 'tis after her, I'm thinking, that you're going? For oh! my heart will break if I sit waiting here for her much longer."

"No," he said sternly, "I do not go in search of your mistress, but of—him."

She caught her breath, drawing back a step—something in his face making his errand clear to her, as it had done to Flora.

"God grant ye may find him," she said, some of the old dark colour flashing into her pale cheek; "God grant ye may punish him as——"

He held up his hand as though impatient of her words, then went on again.

"You will discharge the two other servants to-day," he said, "but *you* will remain here."

She made a gesture of surprise and despair, but he took no heed.

"For you to go in search of her," he went on, "would be worse than folly; but if you desire to do her good service, you will wait quietly for her here, where sooner or later, it may be almost immediately, it may not be for a long while, she will return."

Prue looked at him as though stunned, then a glance of intense relief spread over her features—relief mingled with surprise, and perhaps, who knows, a little womanly contempt for her master.

"She will return," he said calmly, reading

the thought in her mind, "but not to me. Henceforth I shall not reside here, but this house and all within it will remain precisely as it is, and until other and permanent money arrangements are made, I shall deposit with you a sum of money for your maintenance, and for hers, should she arrive unexpectedly."

"And you say she may come soon, sir?" said Prue, her brain still in a whirl, but holding on fast to the thought that there was a definite chance of once more beholding her adored little mistress.

"She may come at any time, at any hour even. So soon as certain facts come to her knowledge, she will probably make her way hither, as being the only place in the world to which she can turn, therefore see that you are always at hand to receive her. As my movements will be uncertain for some time, I can give you no address, but I shall deposit in your hands a sum of money for your own use and hers, and a hundred pounds (that I have this morning drawn out of the bank in your mistress's name), which is absolutely and entirely her own, having been

bequeathed to her by the late Miss Sorel. All my personal belongings, books, papers, clothes, will be fetched from here this afternoon by a person whom I shall send for them. I think that is all."

"And your letters, sir," said Prue timidly, "what shall I do with them?"

"I shall make provision against them," he said, "and none will be sent here. You are not likely to have anything to communicate to me save the intelligence that your mistress has returned, and in the event of her doing so, I shall probably be aware of the fact as quickly as yourself. If my father comes here asking for my address, you will say that you do not know it."

He would not be pursued everywhere, he said to himself, by letters of condolence, of pity, of advice, therefore his safest plan was to let no one, not even Prue, know his future whereabouts.

"And if she comes . . . ." said Prue, trembling and turning aside, "I'm to tell her, master . . . ."

"Tell her," he said, "that the shelter of

this roof and home is open to her always, that she may live out a lifetime here, ay, and repent of her sin at her leisure, if she so wills. Tell her also that if she seek me out, or ever forces her way into my presence, that she will compel me to leave England, and thus debar me from the honourable toil that from the day she disgraced me is the one thing left to me in life. Tell her that henceforth we are as much strangers to each other as though we had never met, but that I forgive her, because I feel that the guilt of her wrong-doing lies as heavily upon my head as upon her own."

In the pause that followed his last words, Prue crept a step nearer.

"And not one little word, sir," she said, "(she being so young, and led away by a bad man and all), to ease her poor, breaking heart?"

"Not one word," he said, "not one syllable. The words that I have spoken to you are the last that will ever pass from me to her, for should we come face to face with each other (as I pray God we never may) she will be to me as one dead—and the living ex-

change not words with the dead. You will tell her this."

An hour later and he had left the house.

Towards evening a man came and took away all his belongings, opposing to Prue's questions as to whither he was taking them, an impenetrable silence that entirely baffled her.

On the following morning (this being the second exodus of servants from the house in the space of four months) the cook and housemaid departed, and Prue was left alone, to watch and wait, to start, shuddering at every sound, to wander restless through the shrouded and deserted rooms, to hear strange voices wailing with every gust of wind that arose, strange footsteps coming and going on the walks without, to ask herself if the watching for *this* sister was to be as long and dreary as had been that of the other—nay, to feel her heart stand still as the thought struck her that perhaps, after all, it would be *Muriel* who would return first, and to whom the story would have to be told of why the little sister who had so long and patiently waited for her was—missing.

CHAPTER IV.

"No azure vein
Wandered on fair-spaced temples ; no soft bloom
Misted the cheek ; no passion to illume
The deep, recessed vision ; all was blight."

MIGNON'S moonlight flitting had fallen on a Friday night ; the departure of Adam had taken place on the following Tuesday.

On the very next day, Prue, sitting below in the kitchen, her work lying unheeded in her lap, heard, at about six of the clock, the sound of footsteps, light, uncertain, and slow, ascending the stone steps that led to the house.

She did not stir, but her head turned slowly, her eyes remaining fixed with horrible

intensity on the open door. Whose were those footsteps, and on what errand did they come? It was incredible that her mistress should return thus early, therefore, some instinct telling her that they were not those of a stranger, it must be—Muriel.

Muriel . . . . and she would have to be told the truth. Even as the one sister had been told the story of the other one's probable shame, so must the elder now be acquainted with the certain ruin that had befallen the younger.

The hall-door was open, Prue had no fear of robbers, and she distinctly heard those wavering footsteps cross the threshold and hall, pause at the dining-room door, turn the key in its lock, and pass in.

A few moments later they sounded again on the tiles of the hall, and after another short pause entered the drawing-room. Again the patter recommenced, and this time Mr. Montrose's former study was visited, and here there was a longer halt than there had been at the other rooms; then they recrossed the hall and went noiselessly up the carpeted stairs.

All this time Prue had sat like a woman bewitched, absolutely mastered by one of those purely unreasoning fits of terror that now and again have held men and women powerless when they know a murderer to be creeping upon them, while there actually remains to them time to escape.

All the expression of her body seemed concentrated in her eyes, and these were fixed upon the open kitchen-door.

She faintly heard those uncanny steps moving about far above her, heard doors open and shut, once even fancied that a window was raised, then they came down again, ever so slowly and lightly, and sounded again in the hall.

They advanced to the top of the stairs, and the sweat broke out upon her brow, as, still mastered by that perfectly unreasoning horror, a moment later she felt rather than heard some one coming down the stairs.

With that the power of movement returned to her, and throwing herself upon her knees, she flung her apron over her head in an ague-fit of fear.

The steps came nearer to her, ceased, a hand touched her on the shoulder, a voice that she had surely never heard before said—"Prue!" The woman slowly drew the apron from before her face, and saw standing before her —Mignon.

"Where is your master?" said the girl, still in that odd starved voice—the voice of one from whose life has been withdrawn every influence that goes to nourish and support it.

But Prue, dumb as the dead, made no reply, only fell back before the new-comer, all her superstitious fears cast out by a fear infinitely greater.

This thing that stood before her, that had stolen Mignon's features, but not her voice, her garments but not her expression, *this* was not her mistress; rather would one say that it was a body that had once lived and died, and being suddenly recalled to life had, with all its horrible experiences yet upon its eyes and lips, been set free to wander for a space among once familiar scenes and people that already had grown strange to it.

The blood curdled in Prue's veins as she

looked at her .... besides the sin and the shame, *what* had come to the girl in the brief space of this one week?

"Where is your master?" said Mignon patiently, and still in that same lifeless, strange tone. Yet there was a ring of command in it to which Prue's natural instinct of obedience responded.

"He's gone away," she said fearfully; "but oh! Miss Mignon, Miss Mignon ...." all her great yearning love expressed itself in those few words, they meant a whole world of things, but the girl to whom they were addressed, neither heeded nor understood, only looked at the woman as from a great way off and said—

"And why did he do that? I suppose you mean that he has not returned from Glenluce?"

Prue passed her hand over her forehead, and rubbed her eyes. Was she asleep or bewitched? But no, the substantial kitchen surroundings were no figments of the brain, and that was her mistress, or her mistress's wraith, standing before her, in soiled, draggled

clothes that looked as though she had not taken them off for many days and nights.

"I thought he would have come back before this," said the girl, finding that she received no answer, and fixing her blank eyes—eyes that suggested the idea that they had become thus through long gazing at some terrible sight—fixed upon Prue.

"He'll never come back any more," said Prue, with a gasping, long-drawn sob, "because . . . . because . . . . oh! Miss Mignon, Miss Mignon!"—and the poor creature held out her arms—"I don't love you a bit the less . . . . you'll never be anything to Prue but her own darling little mistress, and she'll stay with you all your life long, for p'r'aps you'll find her better nor nobody . . . ."

She had folded the girl's passive form to her faithful breast, and was weeping and sobbing over her, kissing her hair and uttering the broken words of love that come rugged and unpolished straight from the heart.

The girl gently withdrew herself from the woman's clinging arms.

"And why will he never come back?" she said.

"Miss Mignon," said Prue, turning aside and growing desperate, "can't you guess—don't you know *why* master's gone away . . . . and how could he ever come back when . . . . when . . . ."

"I must go to him," said the girl monotonously; "if he is still in the Highlands I will go to him, for I must see him, and that at once."

The first sign of life that had appeared in her voice, appeared as she uttered the last few words.

"'Tis not in the Highlands you'll find him," said Prue sadly, "no, nor any other place at all that you can go to him, Miss Mignon . . . . He's just gone out in the wide world to look for them as deserves to be killed for what they've done, and God grant, say I, that he may come up with them, and give them their deserts . . . ."

A flame of fear seemed to be suddenly kindled in Mignon's eyes, her hand suddenly clutched the woman's arm as in a vice; it

was as though a corpse had been suddenly galvanised into life, Prue shrank from her as she cried:

"He has gone after him to . . . . to *kill* him?"

"Ay," said Prue doggedly, "he's gone to do even that."

"To kill him . . . ." said Mignon in a whisper, relaxing her grasp of Prue, and looking straight before her, as though she saw some deadly scene being enacted. "To kill him . . . ."

"When did he go?" she cried.

"The day before yesterday."

"He left a message for me?"

"Ay," said Prue, hanging her head, "but don't ask me for it; I'd best not give it you to-night--not yet awhile."

"You will tell it me now," cried the girl, seizing the woman's arm again, "this instant, quick . . . . quick . . . ."

"He bade me tell you," said Prue slowly, "how he'd left me here to take care of the house, so as when you should be wanting a home to creep back to, as he feared you'd be

wanting one afore long, you'd always have this one to come to."

"Yes, yes," cried Mignon impatiently, "go on."

"Also how he'd left in my charge a sum of money to pay our way, for the house and sich, and for your own use a hundred pounds that was all your own to do as you liked with, 'cause Miss Sorel left it to you."

"All this is no message," cried Mignon wildly, and shaking Prue's arm; "what did he say for *me?*"

"Don't ask me," cried Prue, trembling and turning pale, "leastways not to-night, not to-night . . . ."

"Do you wish to drive me mad?" said the girl, in her eyes so strange a look that Prue dared trifle with her no longer.

"He bade me say . . . . that if ever you sought him out or tried to get speech with him in any way, he'd leave the country and never set foot in it again, for you was strangers to each other now till you died, and if ever you come face to face with each other, 'twould be as if you was already dead, and

live folks, says he, exchanges no words with the dead."

Oh! why did not Prue pause ere it was yet too late, ere the last stroke was given that sent the already tottering mind off its balance? Why could she not read the signs of that ghastly, terrible, young face looking into her own, aright?

"And he hoped you'd repent of your sin at your leisure," said Prue, "and he blamed himself sore for all that had happened, for he reckoned his guilt was nigh about equal to yours."

"His guilt equal to mine," repeated the girl slowly, "and I should have time to repent of my sin."

"Ay, your sin," said Prue solemnly; "for your sin in loving Mr. La Mert better than master, for your sin in forsaking master for him" . . . . the woman paused, arrested in her speech by the expression upon Mignon's face.

"Because I loved him better than my husband," she said in a low intense whisper—"*him* . . . . O my God!" She tossed her arms above her head, breaking out into a peal

of horrible laughter, stopped in it abruptly, gazed around as though frightened, pressed her hands hard against her head . . . . then something seemed to snap in her brain, her rigid arms relaxed and hung by her sides, a foolish smile gathered slowly about her lips, she sighed and looked downwards, plucking with restless fingers at her soiled, disordered dress.

"It is a fine spring morning, Muriel," she said, "and the wind-flowers will all be creeping out . . . . let us go out into the fields and have a merry day together."

CHAPTER V.

"Cease, no more.
You smell this business with a sense as cold
As is a dead man's nose."

"IT is not spring-time, Miss Mignon," said Prue, trembling violently; "it is night, little mistress. See, how dark it grows!—'tis only by the firelight I can see your face . . . ."

The girl looked vacantly around her, shivered, moved her head about restlessly, then took to plucking again at her poor soiled cloak.

"Yes," she said, "it is cold . . . . but not so cold as out there where the leaves are falling, always—always—and at night the rain will come and soak through . . . ."

She looked down at her hands, rubbing them stiffly over each other, then, seeming to miss something from the left one, she held it up close to her eyes, seemed to puzzle over it, knitted her brows, shook her head and sighed.

"A ring!" said Prue, supplying the thought for which the disordered wits were groping. "You used to wear one; is that what you mean, little mistress?"

"A ring!" said Mignon, catching at the woman's words. "I lost it—a long, long while ago. I put it away somewhere, but I can't remember."

She lifted her hand to her head so piteously, that Prue, to whom had come the courage with which some women are gifted in an emergency, almost lost her self-command in tears.

"We will go and look for it," she said, having the sense to humour the girl's fancy, then, taking a light with her, she led her mistress upstairs, pausing by the way to bolt and bar the door that need be set open no longer, either by day or night, for the expected guest.

When they reached Mignon's bedroom, the girl wandered aimlessly about for some time, but at last came to the dressing-table, with its pink china tray in the centre. On this latter she looked down fixedly, then lifting her finger pointed at it, and again seemed struggling to remember something. Prue, too, drew near and looked, and the sight of the tray recalled something to her mind that she had forgotten. She had seen the wedding-ring lying there after her mistress's flight, it had disappeared on the day her master returned, evidently some memory of it was working in and troubling her mistress's mind.

"We will seek it by-and-by," said Prue soothingly, and drew the unresisting girl down into a seat, then with loving hands proceeded to draw off the dusty boots, to remove cloak, hat and gloves, to bathe her face, hands and feet (the latter all swollen and blistered, as though they had walked many miles), and by slow degrees to completely re-clothe her in fresh linen and garments.

The girl passively endured all Prue's ministrations, only once seeming to heed her, and

that was when she sought to remove from her bosom a small packet wrapped in silk, and that from the touch seemed to Prue to contain a letter. This the girl jealously guarded, both then and after, and it was many days before Prue found out what it contained.

The poor woman's heart lightened somewhat over her loving toil, and as she gazed with passionate love into her mistress's unconscious face, she tried to persuade herself that the cloud now obscuring her brain was but temporary, and might pass from her ; for the blank look on the girl's face was far less terrible than that which she had worn ere the mind fled away, and whereas the creature who had come upon Prue in her panic had seemed altogether strange to and removed from her, *this* one was her mistress, distraught indeed, but her very self. When Mignon was dressed she returned to the table, and seemed to puzzle over it for a few moments, then turned to the door and Prue followed.

She went with those uncertain lagging feet downstairs, and into the study, seeming to

miss the crowd of books and papers with which the room had formerly been full, sitting down at last in the arm-chair in which Adam had sat for those long three days and nights, keeping his vigil, and seeking to root her from his heart.

Prue placed the light upon the table, and going into the hall, withdrew the key from the hall-door, ran downstairs, fastened the other entrance, and went upstairs again. She had not been a moment too soon in her precautions, for on her return she found that Mignon had removed the door-chain, and was tugging at the fastenings.

"Where are you going, Miss Mignon?" said Prue, her voice full of fear. "'Tis too late for you to be going out; to-morrow we'll go together, but not to-night."

"Don't you hear somebody calling me?" said the girl, lifting her hand and standing in an attitude of listening; "up yonder in the big town, they are calling, always calling, and I must go, for I've got something to tell . . . . to tell . . . ."

"To-morrow we'll go," said Prue gently,

"but now you're worn out and must take food and rest; and if you're ill, how will you ever be able to go at all?"

Mignon left off pulling at the chain, a ray of comprehension struggled into her blue eyes.

"If I'm ill, I shall not be able to go at all," she repeated, then went away quietly enough with Prue.

The girl required food and warmth, the woman therefore took her to the kitchen, established her in a chair beside the hearth, and closing the shutters, made of the room a picture of homely brightness and comfort.

The firelight shone, and leaped, and reflected itself in the numberless tins and pipkins ranged around, and flickered with many circles on the polished sides of the dish-covers, and deep-bodied jugs and basins.

But Mignon, as she held out her slender hands to the crackling blaze, shivered still, and her vacant, ashen face took no tint of colour from the warmth. Prue served and brought to her food, but the girl only shook her head, never even glancing at it, only keep-

ing her blank gaze fixed steadily upon the burning coals. How loud the clock ticked, how briskly and incessantly the crickets talked! Surely they must say one or two things well worth listening to in the course of these long autumn and winter nights, through which they gossip so garrulously? Prue had taken some work in her hands, lest Mignon should think she was being watched, but by degrees the slowly-moving needle ceased altogether, and the woman sat with dry eyes and heavy heart, looking across at the little silent figure before her.

There sat her mistress, disgraced, ruined, ill in body, stricken in mind, with a future stretching out before her of bitter repentance and miserable regrets, of an alienation from all God's choicest gifts; yet as the woman looked at her, she blessed Heaven that had given her darling back to her, even though she was restored to her—thus.

What would her life have been, she asked herself wildly, without this idolised little creature to tend, to watch over, to love? She would have lost her wits in longing for her,

or worn her body out in seeking her; and in her breast there beat as profound and wondering a gratitude as he may know, who has found the cage-door of his wild bird open, and, while he is mourning for it, discovers that it has suddenly returned of its own free will.

That terrible things had befallen the girl, things at which she could only fearfully and dimly guess, Prue was certain; but was not even this thought bearable, compared with the suspense and agony that would have been hers, had Mignon stayed away, in the power of the villain who had destroyed her?

And seeing her so quiet and gentle, some of the first horror that had fallen on Prue, when she saw the girl, faded, for, strange though it might appear, Mignon's face was now far less suggestive of woe and terrible things than it had been before her wits left her.

A veil was mercifully drawn between the girl and the scenes that had produced upon her so terrible an effect, and Prue sadly wondered what might be the tale of temptation, of force, and of speedy disillusionment

the dead meeting the living, since all communion of spirit would be denied to them?

The one drop of honey in Prue's cup was that she had the girl under her care, that not among strangers or oppressors had her madness come upon her, but in her own home, and with some one to tend her who would do so faithfully.

By degrees her tears ceased, her thoughts grew indistinct; sitting bolt upright, she began to nod, her chin by successive stages almost touching her work. She roused herself, for she must not sleep. Mignon might awake, and fancy herself beckoned out into the night by those ghostly voices, and . . . . and . . . . the woman's head fell back instead of forward, nodding no longer; a moment, and she was in a slumber as profound as was that of her mistress.

* * * * *

She awakened with a violent start to find the broad daylight streaming in, and a chilly morning wind blowing upon her from the open window, to find the fire extinguished, the gas still burning, and Mignon—gone.

The woman started up, and dashing the sleep from her eyes, sprang through the low window, into the garden beyond. Surely she would find her mistress there, but no, it was empty, and she was not at the gate. Was it possible that she had come out, re-entered the house, and was now wandering within it? With a failing heart Prue returned to the kitchen, and searched the house from attic to basement, in vain. Mignon was not there, although her hat and cloak were in her room just as they had been thrown down the night before. The woman clasped her hands in a paroxysm of despair. Where should she seek the girl? and how long ago might she have departed? A terrible picture presented itself of the poor, bewildered creature setting out on foot for some far-away place that she was dimly conscious it was necessary she must reach, though if this were the case would she not most likely go along the high-road from mere force of habit, and might it not be possible to overtake her?

She flung on shawl and bonnet, locked the door behind her, and ran out of the gates.

She met but few people, and nobody whom she knew, and she ran on and on until she got to the high-road, and in sight of the station. The latter put an idea into her head. Mignon had always gone by train on her school-girl trips, and it was just possible that she had wandered in there, and if so, her being without money, her forlorn state would have attracted attention, and caused her to be detained.

The trains ran but infrequently, one in every hour. The clock outside informed Prue that one would be due in twenty minutes.

She flew up the stairs, meeting no one by the way, and drew a long breath of relief and joy as at the farther end of the empty platform she descried Mignon. She looked cold and pinched, the wind was blowing her yellow hair all about her eyes, that were anxiously fixed on what appeared to be an approaching train, but in reality was a pilot engine just emerging from an archway.

"Miss Mignon," said Prue, taking firm hold of the girl's arm, scarcely able to articulate through the greatness of her relief,

"what are you doing here all alone? and why did you come away without me when I promised you I'd come anywhere with you you liked?"

"I couldn't wait," said the girl, restlessly. "Don't you hear a voice calling loud, oh! so loud? 'Come and sit beside me,' it says, 'for it is cold, bitter cold, and I am lonely! don't forget me so quickly.' . . . . That is what it says, over and over again."

"I hear it," said Prue, appearing to listen, "but it says that you're not to go alone, I'm to come with you; that we're to go *together*, and not now, but later on in the day."

Mignon ceased to try and free herself from Prue's grasp.

"Does it say that?" she said, sinking her voice to a whisper. "Then you must come, but soon, or she will be angry, and call me again."

"We will go soon," said Prue, soothingly, as she unfastened her shawl, wrapped it round her mistress's figure, and covered her head with a portion of it; "we'll go home directly, dear heart, and pack up, and come back here again by-and-by."

Mignon, making no resistance, suffered herself to be led away, and they reached Rosemary in a few minutes; but as Prue followed the girl into the house, she wrung her hands in despair. What could she do without a soul to help her, and compelled to watch Mignon night and day, lest she should again make her escape? There would be no peace till she departed, though could there be a madder wildgoose chase than to follow this girl's vagrant fancies up hill and down dale? Yet to use force, restraint—Prue's heart sickened at the thought; come what might, that should never be. So long as her mistress was under her care, she should do as she listed, subject only to such controlling power as love might possess.

After five minutes' hard thinking, Prue came to a decision. That it was one person's work to watch Mignon was plain, and this she could not do with the house and its work upon her hands. She would go to London. In a quiet, decent part of the town she had a friend who let lodgings, and would indeed be willing to do her any good turn, or render her any

assistance that she was able, and she herself would be free to devote all her time to Mignon. If she grew very restless, and still insisted on wandering, then Prue must e'en go with her, and guard her as best she might. To stay here was plainly out of the question, and she set to work at packing her mistress's clothes with a vigour and rapidity that seemed to calm Mignon's restlessness. She even in a fitful, uncertain way rendered some assistance, and seemed satisfied and pleased when all was finished. It was a less easy matter to keep her quiet, when Prue had to go from one room to another, locking up and setting in order, arranging everything for the long absence that she felt to be inevitable. She had thought of an arrangement by which the house would not be without a guardian, and though it gave her a sharp twinge to leave, even for a short time, that unprotected which had been given into her charge, she yet said to herself that her duty was to her mistress first, and that duty she would perform to the best of her power.

She managed to pack her own modest

trunk, and to write two letters, one of which, unseen by Mignon, she addressed to her master, and placed on the table in his study; the other she stamped, and put in her pocket.

She then prepared food for her mistress and herself, but could not prevail on Mignon to take more than a few scanty mouthfuls. All being ready, and Mignon growing restless, Prue put on the girl's hat and cloak, dressed herself, and went down to the gate. After ten minutes' waiting, Providence sent that way a youth of tender years, who undertook, on the promise of sixpence (not to be made over till his return), to go to the Lilytown livery stables and despatch to Rosemary a horse and fly.

The biped, quadruped and conveyance, with a driver to boot, arrived in due season: the luggage was fetched out, and the kitchen-door locked. Mignon, all impatience, had already taken her seat, and in a few moments Rosemary was left behind, and for the third time within four months the girl had set out again on her travels, while

Prue, looking back, asked herself with dim eyes and a foreboding heart, was it even possible or likely that this last journey should have a happier ending than had the two preceding ones?

CHAPTER VI.

"O perilous mouths
That bear in them one and the self-same tongue,
Either of condemnation or approof,
Bidding the law make courtsey to the will."

TWO months had gone by since mistress and maid had left their safe home-shelter, to wander out into the world in search of adventure. A poor distraught pilgrim, a stupid faithful follower, what chance had these of success in their quest, and would they not infallibly come to grief and confusion, as do most earnest, simple folk nowadays, who ride a tilt at a world that has no sympathy with romance, or pity for misfortune?

As yet, however, the adventures of the

pair had been neither dangerous nor exciting; they had simply been profoundly, prosaically miserable.

The world seemed to be standing still, Prue sometimes said to herself, with a dismal shake of the head; she only wished *she* could, but she had by this time almost come to believe that her feet were doomed to go dancing on for ever, like the girl who was vain of her red shoes in Hans Andersen's story. And even if there were a woodman by to cut them off for her, she thought that it would still be her doom to go dancing on, rain or shine, day or night, following her mistress, who in her turn was beckoned forward by some Will-o'-the-wisp, whose glimmer pierced with baneful light the poor clouded brain.

Two months of wandering as vagabonds in the streets of London, up and down, round and about those dirty, crowded paths that Prue had come to know by heart, and at which her soul sickened as she asked herself, was this woeful search, after she knew not what, to go on for ever, or would the

end come but with the cessation of her little mistress's already slender hold upon life?

For no farther than the great city had those indefinite travels to which Prue had resigned herself the day she left Rosemary been extended. Whoever or whatever might be the object of Mignon's search was contained in the town, and when once the girl had left Waterloo, and found herself among the roar of traffic and sea of passing faces, she had grown calmer, and looking eagerly about had seemed to recognise things, although when later they came to a quiet part of the town, she turned restless again and appeared distressed. And from that day, from the moment when with infinite difficulty Prue had prevailed upon her to enter the modest rooms tenanted by Prue's old friend, there had been no keeping the girl within doors; let them watch her as they chose, seek to amuse her as they listed, she would glide out of their midst like a shadow and be in the streets again, turning her head from side to side, looking, looking for something that she could not find. It was all in vain that

Prue followed and brought her home; the girl displayed such skill in eluding her again, that Prue gave up all attempt at coercing her, and did the sole thing possible to her, let the girl go where she would, and herself —followed.

All Mignon's heart was bound up in this mysterious quest; she seldom noticed Prue, rarely spoke to her, and seemed to have lost all her former affection for the woman. And with that marvellous instinct which in mad people almost takes the place of sense, Mignon, no matter how far she went, or by what devious streets and ways, invariably found her way home again, without any reference to the patient shadow that followed at her heels.

Prue sometimes rubbed her eyes and pinched herself to make sure that it was not all a dream, that this girl, clad like herself in the coarse, unlovely dress of the poorest classes, had once been tenderly nurtured, fondly cherished; moreover, the centre to at least four people of such love as is rarely indeed called forth or given. Truly love had been

to her no blessing, but a curse, else had she not come to such a pass of wretchedness and vagabondage to which she had now fallen. Was it possible that she had ever been winsome and laughter-loving and lovely, this girl with the worn and wintry face, that was like a beaten-down snowdrop, and from which her blue eyes, no longer beautiful, looked out upon the passing world with blank and wandering gaze?

As she went to and fro in her shabby, shapeless clothes, the beauty that had once been hers was so hidden and dimmed as to be well-nigh lost, and men's eyes, resting carelessly on her face, seldom or never gave it a second glance, unless for the sake of the misery written upon it. And of insult or molestation from the lower classes, into whose haunts she often strayed, she was entirely free. Her apparent poverty, her wretchedness, made her one of themselves; and having breathed upon and made her one of their own, she was henceforth a child of the people, and heeded by them no whit. In those days it seemed a good thing to Prue

that Mignon's sweet looks had so utterly departed from her, for how else could she have failed to be exposed to a thousand perils against which Prue's weak arm would have been powerless to shield her?

When first the pair had come to London, Prue had dressed her mistress as became her station, but on discovering how much attention the girl had attracted to herself in her wanderings, the woman, with some of that rare good sense that is usually called "common," for the sole reason apparently that it is the most precious and uncommon of all qualities, saw the necessity for change. Hence those miserable garments, sodden and worn by wind and weather, that the girl wore abroad, and beneath which she was as delicately and fastidiously cared for as heart could wish.

For whom was the girl looking? That was the question that Prue asked herself with weary iteration as she walked in her mistress's track day after day. She scarcely thought it was for Muriel, since now and again, and in her sleep, there had fallen from

Mignon's lips words that seemed to reveal a strange fear and dread of her sister, while of the love that had formerly been the religion of her life there seemed to remain not a trace. And if Mignon were not looking for Muriel, all thought of the latter being for the time driven out by a later and more engrossing idea, then could it be for her betrayer, Philip La Mert, or for her husband Adam?

Every one seemed to be looking for somebody else, nothing sorted itself or came straight, and life just then was to Prue a mental rag-bag, in which she plunged her hand only to bring out a bundle of odds and ends.

Where was her master, and had he yet come up with the man upon whom he had vowed vengeance? And where was Mr. La Mert now, and how came it that he had made not an effort to overtake and recapture the girl whom he had taken such desperate pains to win?

Utterly bewildered, Prue's mind revolved every possibility till she became as giddy as a blue-bottle fly imprisoned in a glass tumbler, and at last gave up attempting to find the key to the mystery. From Rosemary had come

not one word of news, good, bad, or indifferent. The woman in whose care Prue had placed the house, and who reached it the day after Prue's departure, reported the arrival of sundry letters for Mr. Montrose, all of which awaited him, together with Prue's, announcing Mignon's return; but from Mr. Montrose himself had come no sign or word, although sixty long days had passed since he set out.

And in all this time Mignon had ceased not from her mysterious search, save when, worn out with bodily fatigue, she would sleep profoundly, or sit, folding and unfolding her restless hands, staring out of the narrow window at the stunted evergreens in their pots. I wonder what goes on within the clouded brain of such an one, whether all is darkness and quietude, save when some glimmer of reason pierces through to it; or whether all is wild hurry and chaos, idea succeeding idea, in lavish profusion, yet all alike unsatisfactory and impossible to grasp?

Only once had the girl shown herself moved by aught that she had seen or heard abroad, and that was the sound of church bells. She

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would start up, trembling all over, when she heard them; and on Sundays it was impossible, no matter what the weather might be, to keep her within doors, for to church after church she would find her way, only to look eagerly at it and turn away again, as though disappointed. Evidently the sound of bells suggested some memory to her, that she was incessantly trying to puzzle out, but could not. Prue sometimes wept when the girl turned her wistful eyes upon her, with the look in them of a dumb creature who seeks to express himself, yet cannot; and would have given ten years of her life to be able to supply the answer after which the toiling brain sought. One day the girl came and laid her slender hand upon the woman's.

"Do you hear a bell," she said, "that tolls, tolls always by day and night? It is loud and deep, as though it came out of the clouds, and if I could hear it, I should be able to find . . . . to find . . . ."

She paused, grew confused, lost the thread of what she had been saying, fell to plucking at her gown in the old restless fashion.

Was there some method in the girl's madness after all? Had she gone no further than London in her flight with Mr. La Mert, and had something actually happened to her there to account for this persistent search?

These were the questions that Prue was now asking herself; and the thought came into her head that she would make an experiment.

"Come with me, Miss Mignon," she said, rising; "and we will see if we cannot find this great bell together;" and there and then she took her mistress within both sight and hearing of Big Ben.

They had never gone within reach of it before; the girl's wanderings, though so long-continued, had covered no great area, and as the first great note rolled out on the air, she started violently, and listened intently; then her face clouded with disappointment.

She shook her head, and pulled at Prue's hand to come away. The woman was not yet disheartened, only half of her experiment was over, and a little later she stood with Mignon beneath the shadow of St.

Paul's, awaiting the stroke of the half-hour. It came; and as the solemn boom! pealed out, Mignon's face changed, as though by magic.

"I shall find it now . . . I shall find it now . . ." she cried, running from Prue's side, and looking eagerly at the great shops all about, as though she expected to find what she sought among them, growing puzzled and sorrowful at last, as seeming to understand that her search was not over yet. It was with difficulty that Prue could persuade her to go home at all that day; and on the morrow she was back again almost as soon as it was light, wandering through bye-streets and alleys, and all manner of strange places, that she had never trodden safely but for her poor dress and lack of comeliness and grace.

She seemed to grow brighter and happier after that day; and Prue, in the midst of all her weary discomfort and fatigue, took heart, and began to hope for better times.

Some curious instinct or cunning apparently guided the girl in her wanderings, for she never went beyond a certain radius; and Prue ob-

served that directly the sound of the great bell came to her muffled, she invariably turned back, so that it would appear the object of her search lay somewhere within its full sound.

It was after a week of this perplexing, round-about search, which, like the crab's progress, seemed to be two steps forward and one back, that Mignon one day turned into a decent, seemingly ancient street, at one end of which was a small church, that lay back at some little distance, having a grave-yard before it.

Like an arrow shot from a bow, Mignon sped forward, and in another moment had reached the rusty iron gates, that stood partially open. Plainly she recognised, remembered the place; but "what," asked Prue, as she curiously followed her, "could she want *there?*"

She leaned her head against the gates, and looked in. It appeared to be a disused burying-ground, or so she thought, until she saw in the distance two or three recently-made graves. Apparently a small strip of new ground had been added that made the

churchyard, disused for many years, again available.

It was not to these newly-opened mounds that Mignon made her way, but to one whose unsightly outline the grass had covered, and falling on her knees beside it, the girl pressed her brow, her lips, her bosom against it, murmuring indistinct words and cries; while Prue, standing afar off, with the long, dank grass under her feet, the murk December sky above her, beginning to understand, asked herself: "Was this the grave of Muriel, or of Mr. La Mert?"

* * * * *

There fell upon Mignon after the discovery of that nameless grave, a peace and quiet that were almost happiness.

No longer she led poor Prue's aching feet on an endless chase, no longer the two passed their lives in the streets, jostled by the busy crowds; the girl would every day pay a visit of longer or shorter duration to the graveyard, then come away home with Prue, and sit for hours together perfectly still. Sometimes a look of horror struggled across the blankness of her face, once or twice she had

swerved away from the grave as though some ugly thought or idea had stung her; but for the most part she seemed to have a weight removed from her, and to have attained to what she desired.

It was now close upon Christmas, and the streets were full of that sweetest and best beloved of flowers, the violet, that bloomed from every nook and corner, filling the hands of countless poor women, to whom its perfume and beauty meant no more and no less than—bread. Of these gentle wayfarers, messages of love from Nature in her haunts to the men who toiled in the great city, Mignon bought great bunches daily, or rather she made Prue do so, passing by all but the freshest, and then going away with her hands filled, to lay them upon that mysterious grave.

Prue, from a distance used to look and look, and wonder with all her might whom this violet-decked mound contained. It was a long one, quite long enough to hold a man, and Muriel had been tall for a woman, while Mr. La Mert had not been tall for a man, so

that it was impossible for her unpractised eye to decide which of them might be sleeping there.

It was not very long, however, before her doubts were set at rest, and the fashion of it was in this wise :

One day, Mignon during her accustomed visit, appeared for the first time to take heed of the surrounding tombstones, and the sight of them seemed to suggest something to her mind that had hitherto entirely escaped it. Then began one of those efforts at remembering that were so piteous and painful to witness ; the fugitive idea that disappeared just as she was about to grasp it, the precious half-thought that she was not able to complete, these irritated and distressed her almost to frenzy. She began her wanderings again, but the area of them was so circumscribed, and that which she sought so near at hand, that on the third day she found it.

Prue marvelled what was going to happen next, as her mistress stopped at a curious little yard lying back from the houses in the narrow street where it was situated, and

as she drew nearer perceived that it was that of a stone-cutter and tombstone maker.

Blocks and fragments of stone, statues, tablets roughly hewn and not yet inscribed, others half completed, and some all discoloured and defaced, entirely filled the enclosure, while below a plaster bust of the first Napoleon leant a small wooden board on which was inscribed

"MANGLING DONE HERE."

A tipsy wretched-looking man, who supported himself with one hand against the low palings, and swayed to and fro, occasionally doubling up altogether, was extending his right hand towards the grimy stones and statues, and shaking his head sadly, as though he were philosophising on the mutability of all things, and applying the lesson to himself. Mignon slipped past the poor maudlin wretch, to whom, nevertheless, there came in his cups gleams of understanding, to which he was a stranger when sober, and passing with swift feet in among the dismal heterogeneous collection, looked about her until she espied a pure snow-white marble

tablet, that showed out like a lily from its dusty and mutilated surroundings. She flew to it, paused breathless before it, and clasped her hands with joy. Again the poor witless creature had been guided to the object of her search, again instinct had asserted itself successfully.

Prue, her heart beating, certain that at length she was on the brink of a discovery, drawing near, looked over the girl's shoulder, and read the following inscription:

"MURIEL: AGED 20."

CHAPTER VII.

"O Heavens! die two months ago and not forgotten yet? Then there's hope a great man's memory may outlive his life half a year."

THE stonecutter at this moment appeared upon the scene, and, concluding the oration in course of delivery outside the railings by summarily bidding the man to move on, he turned to give his attention to the two shabby women who stood looking at the marble tablet. Mignon's face was hidden by the ugly, downbent hat she wore, but to Prue he looked for speech.

"Anything I can do for you to-day in the tombstone line, ma'am?" he said, deciding in his own mind that here was a customer whose

order (if any) would be of the most modest and humble description.

Prue answered his question with another.

"Who ordered that tombstone?" she said, pointing at the one which bore Muriel's name.

The man's face, an ordinarily good-humoured one, took a gloomy expression as his eyes followed Prue's finger.

"Oh! *that?*" he said; "that's a sore question, mistress, for I'm out o' pocket by that stone to the tune of more pounds than you'd ever guess on. 'Twas ordered come nigh on three months agone, and, as my wife says, more fool I to go to hexecute a horder like that without ever a taking of the lady's name as hordered it."

"A lady ordered it?" said Prue, beginning to see daylight; "can you mind just what she was like?"

"Ay," said the man; "for spite of all the trouble she war in, she was jest the purtiest critter I ever clapped these eyes upon, she war. She come in all of a tremble, and as white as that there stone, and, sed she, 'Will you make me the whitest, beautifullest tomb-

stone to be got in all the world, for the sweetest soul to lie under as ever lived? for,' sed she, 'I can't a-bear to think she's a-lying all out there in the cold without nothing over her to show as there are them above-ground as rek'lects her.' I asked her what the 'scription should be, and she said 'Mural, aged 20;' just that, and no more, and when I said a comfortin' verse out o' Scripture 'ud look well, something about a broken lily or the shorn lamb, or sich, she said 'No; nothing but them three words, Mural, aged 20.' Had to look it out in a dickshunary, cos I thought she meant a mural tablet, but found 'twas a woman's name, and an outlandish one too, I'm thinkin'."

"And did she say she'd come back?" said Prue.

"She seemed all lost and dazed like," said the man, who leaned across a broken column, with a wisp of straw between his lips, seemingly taking a satisfaction in repeating the story, "as if she'd got a bad blow and didn't rightly know which way to turn, nor what to be about. Sed she, 'I've got no money, not

even none to take me home,' and she looked down at her little feet as though they was a-going to carry her there; 'but I'll come back,' sez she, 'to-morrow or next day with the money,' and then I thought she said suffink about her 'usband. But, lor! that must ha' been just a slip, for only to think of that young lass with a 'usband; why 'twas downright larfable. There might be one a-growing up for her somewheres, and maybe more nor one sweetheart to fight over her, but *that* bit of a thing married? No, no! 'Tain't possible, sez I! Howsumdever I made it, and there 'tis, and there 'tis like to stop till Doomsday, for I ha'n't seen or heerd a word more of her, nor don't reckon as I ever shall."

Mignon at that moment turned her face away from the tombstone and towards the man; he saw her and started.

"If it worn't that yon young woman's so pale and sick-lookin', and dressed so different to t'oth—the lady who came, for she war dressed very handsome, though dusty, I'd say that them two was the very moral of each other," he said, in a startled tone.

A thorough waiting-woman's pang for her mistress's poor shabby clothes touched Prue, as she said shortly:

"Yon is my young lady, Mrs. Montrose, the same as come to you three months ago; she'd have come before, but she've had other things to think of. And what may be the price of the stone as she ordered?"

The man looked dumbfoundered—astonishment, relief, anxiety, succeeded each other on his countenance, the last expression finally predominating. This young lady had grown poor, as her clothes sufficiently attested, and she was not likely to be able or willing to pay the large price that he had set upon it, for in obeying her orders no possible expense had been spared. He opened his lips at last, and named a sum that to Prue's modest notions seemed fabulous, and yet that was a fairly honest charge, as charges go.

"That's a deal of money," she said, pursing up her lips, "and I don't know nothing 'bout such things. I'll ask somebody who does, and see what they say."

But Prue had reckoned without her host. Mignon at that moment approached, and drew her towards the stone.

"Help me to carry it," she said; "don't you see that it is for her? She has waited for it such a long, long while, and now we will take it to her."

She put her frail arms round the heavy slab, sighed, and looked piteously for help at Prue, the man, who had followed, staring at her in wonder.

"Her mind is gone," said Prue, gently; "I reckon 'twas *that*," she pointed towards the tombstone, "that did it. You was her sister."

The man, stroking his chin thoughtfully, looked pityingly at the girl, but his mind was evidently much exercised with his own affairs. Would he get rid of this white elephant, or would he not? And if this young lady were not right in her head, could she be made to pay the debts that she had incurred?

He was not long kept in suspense. A very few moments' reflection had convinced Prue that there would be no moving her mistress from that spot unless the grave-

stone went with her, therefore the sooner she went home and got the money, the better.

"My mistress 'll not stir from here—still you'd best watch her," she said to the man, with a heavy sigh. "I'm going to get the money, and 'll be back in an hour or so."

She departed, leaving the stone-cutter still leaning against the broken column, twirling the bit of straw between his lips, and regarding the little figure that sat on a block of stone hard by, as though it were by far the most interesting study in his collection.

When Prue returned, she found both in precisely the same attitude as she had left them. Business, mangling included, was apparently slack that morning, and no other customers seemed to have appeared. Vanishing into the limbo beyond, the man presently returned, bearing a small ink-bottle, a pen, and paper. Squaring his elbows, and sticking his tongue into alternate cheeks, while his head rested on his right shoulder, he made out the bill (using a discoloured slab for a table), receipted, and handed it back to Prue.

"You'll have it put up now—directly?" said Prue, before parting with the money, knowing that Mignon would stay there all night were her humour not fallen in with.

The man looked doubtful, he didn't know if he'd got anybody near by to help him—he would see—and again departing, he presently re-appeared with a youth who answered to the name of "Sam."

The money paid over, they took up the tombstone between them and went their way, Mignon and Prue following.

It was a sad little procession enough, but it had not far to go, and before the short December day had quite closed in, the stone gleamed in all its flawless purity at the head of the hitherto nameless grave, over which Prue had so long and vainly pondered.

But as the woman marked the large expanse of white that was as yet bare of inscription, she said to herself, with a terrible tightening at the heart, that there was ample room for yet another, and that when the daisies should be springing over Muriel's

grave, they would be springing over Mignon also, and that though in life they had been parted by cruel fate, in death they would not be divided.

CHAPTER VIII.

"The gods die first;
And they whose heart is dry as summer dust,
Burn to the socket."

NIGHT in the streets of London, and the great hush and peace of an universal rest spread like a mantle over the silent, sleeping city. Night . . . that comes to all, to the oppressed, the poor, the weary, as to the light-hearted who take no thought for the morrow, and sleep, that is the one good gift of God of which no tyrant or taskmaster, however cruel, has power to deprive us. For a few hours, at least, the bitter tongue that has all day scourged and stung, will move no longer, but hang dumb and devoid of venom; the harsh hand

that has driven and chastised will lie nerveless as an infant's, and the busy plotting brain lose its cunning in idle, harmless dreams; yea, until the morrow, prince and peasant, tormentor and victim, murderer and saint will alike be enfolded in the innocence of God-given sleep, and for these few hours at least are equal in the one blessing that is common to all.

And what a clean, white, beautiful city had not the moonbeams made of it on the night of which I write! How deceitfully in their white splendour had they glorified all that was picturesque, ennobled all that was mean and sordid, until the rudest objects were sightly and pleasant to behold!

Prue, awakened by that pure and brilliant shining, or by some unusual sound, felt herself turn cold with dread as she perceived that the door of the inner room in which Mignon slept, and across which her own bed was drawn, stood a little way open. Starting up, she at once discovered that room to be empty. The girl must have stepped over the sleeping woman, and so made her escape. Hastily

dressing herself, Prue, wasting no time in searching the house, and finding, as she expected, the front door unfastened, sped on, like one possessed, through the streets, clear as daylight, to the place, nigh upon two miles away, to which she felt certain the girl had gone.

Her mistress alone in the streets of London at this hour! Moreover, with her woman's strength, her wits gone from her, into what peril might she not run, or what might not befall her, all defenceless and astray as she was? And so, as the woman hurried on, she took no heed of the beauty of the night, save inasmuch as it afforded more light, and therefore more safety, as she hoped, to her darling. Except the policemen on their beats she met scarcely a soul, for there is no place quieter than the heart of the city after midnight, and Prue's heart gave a great jump as, passing under the shadow of St. Paul's, the great clock above rang out the hour of *two*.

In a few minutes she had gained the churchyard, and making her way to the stone that shone pure as snow in the moonlight,

drew a deep breath of relief as she saw a dark form stretched beside it, whose cold cheek rested against the yet colder marble, while her arms were thrown around it, as though in protection.

The night was intensely cold, every star burned clear and intense as a jewel in the sky overhead.

The girl might well die of this exposure, thought Prue fearfully, as she made her way through the long grass to the girl. What could have possessed her to come out at such a time, unless, indeed, she had been beckoned forth by that mysterious power said to be exercised by the moon over all mad people, and that compels them to gaze upon her, even against their will?

Of the strange and baleful effects produced by the beautiful queen of night whole volumes have been written, and eerie and spectral are some of the stories told of her.

Ambroise Paré has proved how it excites the spirits, Pliny relates how drowsiness, stupor, and mysterious disorders are produced by sleeping in its beams, while Van Helmont

asserts that a wound inflicted by moonlight is so obstinate and difficult to treat as to be well-nigh incurable; and Arabs and Egyptians alike are careful to hide their features when sleeping beneath it in the open air, lest they receive one of those treacherous moonblows that will turn one-half of the face a different colour to the other.

As Prue drew nearer, she made two discoveries. Her mistress was fast asleep, and she was not alone.

A man's figure, divided from Mignon by Muriel's narrow grave, knelt, his left hand pressed palm downwards against the grass, his right half hidden in his breast, as though he sought something, or was trying to keep back some gnawing pain or hunger.

"Was he seeking a weapon with which to strike the sleeping defenceless girl yonder?" Prue asked herself, as she swiftly approached; "had this man met her in the brightly-illumined streets, and, taking advantage of her loneliness, followed her even *here?*"

She was but a few yards away when the man, abandoning his intent watch of Mignon,

suddenly flung his arms high above his head, his face being for a moment lifted to the sky, then, swaying forward, fell across the grave, his head almost at the girl's feet.

Prue paused abruptly, all fear of violence or insult gone from her heart, but in their place an intense loathing and hatred that made her tremble like a leaf as she stood, for she had recognised in the man before her, he who had blighted her mistress's life, making of her an outcast and a wanderer on the face of the earth, and all the misery of the past, all the dreary desolation of the future, the work of this man's hands, rose up before the woman, moving her to a strength of anger that Adam himself could scarcely have surpassed.

It seemed unnatural to her that Mignon could sleep on in the neighbourhood of this traitor, that the mere fact of his breathing the same air had not power to awaken her as with a sense of suffocation, and the woman was passing away on to her mistress's side, meaning to take her, when something arrested her steps, and she stood irresolute,

looking down on the motionless figure of the man and girl before her.

For somehow it was conveyed to Prue's mind, as such things mysteriously are conveyed, perchance by the quiver of a lip, the motion of a hand, or the utter abandonment of an attitude, that she stood in the presence of one of those soul-paroxysms that for the time being annihilate the identity of the onlooker, compelling him to see, think, move, even breathe only at the volition of the person they are watching.

A few moments, and the bowed head was lifted, once more the grave divided the man and girl, and the woman, standing a few yards behind him, saw him stretch out his hand and cautiously, curiously touch a fold of Mignon's coarse stuff gown. Then, withdrawing it, shuddered, crouched downwards as one smitten to earth by conscience and God alike, anon lifting his haggard eyes to the wan and weary face that scarcely made a stain on the marble tablet, and that no man would love for its beauty now; yet about whose forlornness there still hung a wistful, girlish look of

youth and innocence, that, God knows how, had clung to it through all her shame.

The touch of that coarse clothing seemed to burn his hand . . . . She was clad thus, *she* . . . . she was alone at this hour of the night, alone she must have traversed the streets of London ; and was that look upon that white and wasted face grief or . . . starvation ?

To the girl who filled the mound between them he had brought . . . . death, and now, secure from further storm and shipwreck she slept, let us hope, soundly and well, but to this other who survived he had brought—what ?

He looked downward at his hands, surely there should be blood upon them ; was he not as much the murderer of these hapless sisters as any doomed wretch who lay awaiting the consummation of his sentence on the morrow ?

Like twin-flowers formed out of dew and sweetness, and sunshine, the sisters' faces rose up before him, as he had once beheld them, and now a mound of crumbling earth represented the one : yon poor frail outcast the

other, and for the life that had gone out in darkness, for the one that yet more miserably dragged on, should not a heavy reckoning be required before the tribunal of God, if not of man? From the dead lips now mouldered away beneath, no shriving syllables of peace or pardon had fallen, while from those of the girl who lived, would not words infinitely more terrible than any the dead could speak, issue, when she should awaken and recognise his features?

And he must awaken her, he said, with a shiver that was partly physical cold, she would die else of the exposure; but with his return to the consciousness of bodily discomfort, the subtle influence that had held Prue captive ceased, and noiselessly as a shadow she passed him, and kneeling down by her mistress's side, put both arms around her:

"Waken, mistress," she said, "waken, waken—come away home, come away . . . ."

Slowly, drowsily, for exhaustion and the intense cold had almost thrown her into a lethargy, Mignon opened her blue eyes full

upon Philip. He still knelt on the other side of the grave. Upon his face, upturned to hers, the moonlight shone clear as day.

Her eyes became fixed; a look of knowledge, of recognition, flashed to them with the speed of electricity. Dashing aside Prue's arm, she sprang to her feet like a panther, her nostrils dilated, her breath coming in quick, short pants, then her hand went faltering sideways downwards, as though seeking a knife; she drew back a step, and—

"*You!*" she cried in a low, harsh whisper, and the unutterable loathing, hatred, and passion expressed in that one whispered word absolutely appalled Prue with their intensity. Then the fire so fiercely kindled went out like a suddenly extinguished torch, and the cloud that for one moment's space had been dispersed by some lightning intuition or memory, closed round her again; she stood irresolute, as one from whose hand the weapon has been struck without which she is powerless to fight.

Philip, who had covered his face with his

hands, as though cowering under the anticipated shock of her next words, curiously surprised at the halt, the stillness that followed on that one burning syllable, lifted his head, looked, and saw in her face that which in her slumber had been hidden from him. How it was but a mindless body that stood on the opposite side of the grave. How the essence that had made her what she was—in short, Mignon—had fled, leaving but the husk that had contained it. I think that as he realised the truth, as he beheld in the eyes of the girl he had so madly loved the doom brought down by his sin upon her, that the bitter cup that had been filling, filling always since that May-day when he had first beheld her, received its last drop, and that thenceforth, no matter what further blows Fate might be pleased to inflict upon him, he was absolutely proof against them. He had reached the limit of human suffering, when, with a ghastly cry, he fell all his length along the grave, and in his agony bit the grass and earth between his teeth, praying that God would strike him dead as he lay,

nor ever again compel his eyes to rest on that living mockery of the thing that had once represented to him all the beauty, the sweetness, and the joy of earth.

Was it so very long ago that the mere sight of a simple, sweet-faced flower would bring her to his thoughts, when the faint sigh and murmur of the summer breeze would be to him as her gentle voice, the rustle of a leaf as the sound of her footfall, and all things fair, and gay, and blooming, suggested her in myriad shapes of delight ?

"Tell him he must go away," said Mignon, pulling at Prue's hand, a confused look of horror and aversion upon her face, "he must not come here. No one must come but me."

"You hear what my mistress says, sir," said Prue, overcoming by a violent effort the distaste she felt to addressing Philip, "you're to go away ; and sure," she added bitterly, "'tis the least you can do to respect her wishes."

He rose, not looking at Mignon, but downwards at the grave that by the sovereignty of crime was surely his, and with one yearning,

hopeless look at Mignon, he turned, and, as though the grace of obedience alone were left to him, went slowly away, and passed out through the open gates.

As he disappeared, Mignon pressed both hands hard against her brows, and for the second time that night there came into her eyes a flickering ray of reason.

"I remember now," she said slowly and painfully, "he is a murderer, and," she took one hand from her brow, and pointed her forefinger downward at the grave at their feet, "he killed—*her*."

CHAPTER IX.

"One woe doth tread upon another's heel,
So fast they follow."

MURDERER or no murderer, Philip La Mert was fast approaching a higher tribunal than that of man, and if Adam would wreak his vengeance upon him, then must he come quickly, or his enemy would have escaped him, sailing out on the tide of that mysterious ocean that returns no mariners, nor ever in its ebb and flow casts back to us one sign to tell if the departed ones have safely reached the opposite shores, or, object of our more earnest question still, of what those shores and the land that lies beyond may consist.

And when Prue, on the day following that

meeting at the grave, had again found herself face to face with him, and from his lips heard the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, her woman's heart had gone out in pity to the man whom she so well remembered in the heyday of his boldness and beauty, and whose physical sufferings at least might compel ruth from those who would have denied all pity to his mental ones.

With a great dread had Prue been aware, on the preceding night, of those steps tracking her own and Mignon's homewards, that she knew to belong to Philip. It had been with a positive determination to go away on the morrow that she had at last lain down to rest, for how could she doubt but that once again he would seek to establish his power over her mistress, and how was the girl to resist him in her forlorn, defenceless state ?

But when that morrow came, and with it the enemy against whom all her energies were for the time being bent, she had found herself compelled to hearken to him, and, at his miserable tale, amazement, joy, despair, relief, had succeeded each other so rapidly in

her breast as to leave her breathless at the last.

Her first impulse, when all was told, had been to rush straight to her adored little mistress, to kiss her hands, her feet, the very hem of her garment, and implore forgiveness for the readiness with which she had accepted the fact of Mignon's guilt; her second, to burst into passionate weeping as the thought struck her that the truth came too late, too late to save her mistress from the hearing of those cruel words that had overturned her reason, too late to save her from the terrible curse of God that had fallen upon her.

"If master only knew—if he only knew!"

These were the first words that uttered themselves out of all the confusion of thoughts that distracted her.

And then it had been Philip's turn to listen to a story, to have, if possible, the darkness of the shades about him deepened as he hearkened, to find how Mignon had been beggared of all, even to her reason, through him, to discover that in bitterest

irony of fate, she had been believed to have lost herself for love of one whom she loathed above all things created under heaven.

If aught could animate with strength that feeble frame, so gallantly struggling against the mortal weakness that beset it, it would be the wild longing that now possessed him to come face to face with Adam, to commit the one act of reparation that lay in his power ere death placed it beyond his reach for ever; so that now, if Adam were desirous of meeting Philip, the latter was even more imperatively desirous of meeting him, and henceforth in the streets of London a double search was being prosecuted, while poor mad Mignon's life was wearing away under the fever of a longing that she could not utter, and one only of the four people whose lives had been so closely intertwined soundly slept, her troubles over, in her lonely grave in the churchyard in the City.

* * * * *

When Philip had returned home on the morning following the day when he believed himself to have made the discovery of Mig-

non's love for him, he had returned victor, his higher nature having at length conquered his lower in the protracted struggle of the night. He had renounced this sweet, strange, precious gift that had fallen to him, he had sworn, with his whole strength of body and soul, that, of his own will, he would never look upon her face again, that he would not have the sin upon his soul of encouraging this love that was pure, because unconscious, by either look or word—nay, that it should be left to wither, and gradually die for lack of sustenance, to be replaced by-and-by with that love for her husband that bears the same relation as fruit to blossom, and that is so infinitely better worth the taking, but so immeasurably less lovely and pleasant to the eye!

Did he contemplate this later love with calmness? or did not flesh and blood rebel fiercely against this relinquishment to another of that for which he had longed as he had longed for naught else in the course of his life?

I trow not. Only when daybreak came

he had cast out the devils in his heart, and taken one more step upon that path of atonement, of which the first had been planted when on that day in Paris he had resolved to disobey the beckoning finger of passion to follow that of duty.

And then he had reached home and thrown himself down to a heavy, dreamless slumber that had lasted all day, and from that sleep he had been awakened by a summons so urgent that his servant had at last, through the messenger's very importunity, been compelled to convey to him, and Philip had become aware that not one moment of breathing space had been allowed to him, that his vows of never seeing Mignon again were vain as wind, for that into her presence he was, by the compelling force of his vow to her, now bound to go, to go with the death-warrant of Muriel upon his lips, with that upon his soul which when uttered would shrivel all her love, as the lightning blackens and kills the green tree, the pride of the forest. Even as the messenger spoke, he saw (and, alas! it was always thus

to the end—it was Mignon first, Muriel last in everything, and his sin was heinous in his own eyes only as regarded its effects upon her sister) the look that he had last seen in Mignon's eyes, the look that would grow in them when she knew the truth, though not for one moment did the dastard idea cross his mind of breaking the promise that he had given in Mr. Montrose's house but a few days past. Without the loss of a moment he must fetch her to her sister's death-bed; there must be no delay, for if the sisters met not now, then they never would upon earth. Yet, as he dismissed the messenger and gave the requisite orders for his departure for Rosemary, he found himself stupidly wondering in what form of words he would utter the summons; nay, as his horses bore him swiftly through the night, and each moment brought him nearer to Mignon, his mind seemed absolutely to lose the capacity for thought, and memory alone placed certain words in his power, so that he began mechanically to mutter over and over again: "Come, Mignon, come!"

These words were graven on his heart; they now, by no effort of will, rose to his lips, and he found himself clutching at and clinging to them as one who knows himself to be helpless without their aid. When he reached Rosemary, as one who walks in a dream, he had, without consciously thinking, gone straight to the garden, feeling no surprise at finding Mignon there, and as a child repeating a lesson he had said, "Come, Mignon, come!"

As to thought of the possible misconstruction placed on the girl's hasty departure with him, that which then stood to him for his mind was as blank of any such thought as of the vision of the death-bed to which he was going; he just then felt, saw, and comprehended solely with the senses, and was conscious of nothing in heaven or earth but that he now owned Mignon's love, and that in the space of a couple of hours he would be vile in her eyes. Even when the girl was seated beside him in the carriage, her hand upon his arm, her passionate questions raining upon his ears, he was not able to drag his regard from those

two fatal facts; a reply of some sort he must have given her, and one that conveyed the knowledge of her sister's danger to her mind; for she had covered her face and shrunk back into a corner, asking no more. Nevertheless, he was, neither then nor afterwards, aware of the exact words that he used.

When they were in the train the attitude of the two remained the same. The girl asked no further questions, seemingly fearful of the replies that she might receive, but with convulsively clasped hands, and fixed eyes looking out into the blackness of the night, endured that intolerable fever which surely we have all known when on some desperate errand, the issue of which is life or death to that which we passionately love.

The heart and soul, annihilating space, traverses the journey in an instant; the helpless, longing body, no matter at how swift a rate it may actually be progressing, seems to stand stock-still, and the enforced inaction becomes a physical torture that is to a certain extent merciful, since for the time it partially paralyses the action of the brain.

Thus Mignon, by some curious process that almost reduced her mind to the same level as Philip's, seemed to see the end of her journey resolved into a grotesque question of ribbons. She wore mauve ones that day; when she set out on her homeward journey—would they be the same colour, or—black? Mauve or black, mauve or black; that was the question that she asked of herself over and over again, with the dull persistence of a child or an idiot, as she stared alternately at the black window-pane or the cushioned carriage before her.

If they were mauve still, she would have got her darling safe again; if they were black . . . .

She clasped her hands wildly together, and looked at Philip, who sat, his hat pulled low over his brows, his arms folded on his breast, motionless as a figure carved out of stone, and the words that trembled on her lips died unspoken.

Had he not told her too much already? She would still cheat herself with a doubt, a hope; she would still hug that "if," to her breast, which interposed itself as a shield

between her and the certitude of accomplished fate, and then her eyes returned to the black window pane, and her poor lips began dumbly to murmur over and over again the question of the ribbons, black or mauve, mauve or black ?

To Philip the moments tarried not, but sped swift as lightning. He would have held time back had he possessed the power, and he shrank, as may the craven malefactor at his approaching doom, from the moment when the sisters should be face to face with each other, and when upon Mignon's eyes, but yesterday so exquisite with love, should grow the awful look of hatred that would surely strike him dead as he stood.

And even as the incongruous thought of the ribbons had intruded itself into Mignon's intense absorption of mind and body, so Philip, whose whole faculties were bent to one point, found himself remembering something that he had heard or read a long time ago, and yet that he had never thought of since, but which now seemed to exactly symbol forth this precious love of Mignon for

him that was truly to endure but for a night, and vanish with the first chill light of day. Some one, he could not remember whether he who told him had witnessed, or was merely describing, the phenomenon, had related how, of all ravishing sights in the flower kingdom, there is nothing that can compare with the sight of a coffee plantation in full bloom. The snowy blossoms do not steal forth in niggardly hesitating fashion, but bursting simultaneously from their sheaths, the fields are in a single night covered by a spotless mantle of white that exhales an indescribable but exquisite fragrance.

But it is a beauty so ephemeral that eagerly indeed, lest he lose it for ever, must it be drank into the gazer's soul; it is a fragrance that he who would taste it to the uttermost must quaff without delay, for, alas! within the space of twenty-four hours the snow-white flowers wither, the subtle odour passes away, and only a memory and a dream is left of that which was but a moment ago so matchless a reality. And even thus, he said to himself, would be Mignon's love for him. Yea, even as these

flowers, it would wither, it would fade, it would be as though it had never existed, and unlike those hardier blossoms that slowly swell to maturity, and abide with us for awhile, *this* dazzling, fragrant flower would lie in his hand barely so long as should suffice to him to realise its exceeding preciousness and beauty, then he would be left worse than empty-handed, and without even the memory of a vanished joy to fill the void.

For he knew that after this night he should never again be able to take that exultant pride in Mignon's love, that had intoxicated him the preceding evening, that after the disclosure so inevitably near at hand, her passion, even if it still struggled feebly on, three parts quenched in hatred, could never be the same as it had been when she believed him to be her friend, and—Muriel's.

Presently he found himself dully wondering that she did not speak, that she did not torture him with her questions, her guesses, and then it came into his mind that perhaps, since she had heard his story (had she not once told him so with her own lips ?), she was now

connecting it with that of Muriel, and even blindly groping her way to a dim suspicion of the truth.

Almost without his own volition he abruptly left his seat, and crossed over to the one opposite hers.

She looked up into his face, not speaking, her whole bearing one agonised question, but he did not reply to it: only with a great yearning and passion in his eyes gazed at her, asking himself for one brief moment, might she not, for love's sake, forgive him this sin that he had committed?

As yet she guessed nothing—so much he knew by the simple trust of her gesture, her attitude—and once again the demon within him whispered, "Why do you tell her the truth? do not take her to Muriel, but make her your own now while she is safely in your power, and beyond the possible intervention of friendly aid. . . ."

Of the deadly peril in which Mignon stood in that moment she never knew, only wonder filled her heart when Philip, rising as abruptly as he had approached her, set the full space of

the carriage between himself and her, and until the train finally stopped, neither moved nor spoke.

In a few moments they were on their way to Muriel, although up to the moment of the man asking whither he should drive them, Philip could not have told what direction his tongue would bid the man to take.

On, on through the crowded streets they sped, and Philip observed what Mignon did not, how that each moment they were leaving the wide, well-lit thoroughfares behind, and plunging into those purlieus of poverty, vice, and ruffianism, into which a prudent man would think twice before venturing in broad daylight.

Mignon, whose suspense had now reached the point of positive agony, looked at, without heeding the sordid streets, the barrows with their guttering candles, the slatternly half-dressed women, chaffering with the hucksters over their wares, at all the unsavoury, unlovely sights and sounds of a London back street, and found herself, like a parrot with its one cry, dumbly asking over again the question

of the ribbons—black or mauve, mauve or black?

The driver stopped at the door of a mean, miserable-looking tenement, of which the door stood open, while a sickly glimmer of light shone here and there in the dingy windows.

"It is a mistake," cried Mignon, trembling, and leaning out. "She cannot be *here* . . . ."

Philip, who had alighted on the other side, now opened the door, and without a word, held out his hand to assist her to alight.

His silence, more than this, the ominous look in his set face, sent a strange chill through her, and as mechanically she descended, hope died in her breast, and Muriel, a moment ago so near, seemed to recede from, and stand at a great distance from her. Trembling, she looked upwards at the narrow, many-windowed house, then started violently, as from a lower room there pealed out a hoarse shout of tipsy laughter, while on the pavement hard by, a hurdy-gurdy man set his barrel to the tune of "Home, sweet home."

As she crossed the dismal threshold a dirty woman came out of a room at hand,

and stared at her with a mingled familiarity and surprise, that puzzled, yet did not affright the girl, as, swiftly advancing, she said:

"My sister?—she is here; she is ill, will you take me to her at once?"

The woman looked over the girl's head at Philip, who now entered, and repeated incredulously—"Your sister?" then with an appraising glance at the girl's dress, and another at that of her companion, shook her head, and set her arms akimbo.

"You've made a mistake, miss," she said, coarsely, yet not ill-naturedly, "'tis not the likes o' you as has sisters stoppin' in this house, leastways—"

"I told you it was a mistake," said Mignon, turning to Philip feverishly: "O! do not lose a moment, or we may get to her too late—"

But Philip had drawn from his breast-pocket the written address that had been furnished him, and the name under which Muriel was then passing.

He handed it in silence to the woman, upon whose face, as she read, there dawned a stupid, dazed wonder, then she looked from

the paper to Mignon, from Mignon to the paper back again.

"She is here," cried Mignon, seizing the woman's arm in her excitement, and shaking it, "O! tell me, she is not . . . she is not . . . *dead?*"

For reply the woman lifted her grimy forefinger, and pointed upwards.

"Her as you're asking for, she's there," she said; "there's no missing the way—she lies in the attic."

"Stop here, sir," she cried, in quite a different tone, as the girl, swift as lightning, sped up the narrow stairs, and disappeared from her sight.

If the house had seemed full of waking, noisy people to Mignon a moment ago, it was none the less full of sleepers, she thought, as she passed upwards through the heavy breathings of seemingly countless human beings—women who lay, as sometimes she perceived through the open doors, herded together like wild beasts, in all the grotesque ugliness of profound slumber, a squalid gruesome sight that turned her sick, as, still mounting higher

and higher, she pushed on to that attic where she had been told she should find her darling.

Surely, surely the air would be purer up there, and these noisome fumes would be left behind, else Muriel, who loved all sweet smells and pleasant sights, must find it hard to breathe, and so thinking, and clinging resolutely to the belief that her sister was still quick, and able to discern between good and evil, she found herself standing before a shut door, and knew that she had reached her long journey's end, and that on the other side of it was . . . . *what?*

For a moment she hesitated, covering her face with her hands, then, softly turning the handle, she found herself in a narrow bare room, lit by a skylight, through which there showed the sapphire of God's sky, while by the light of a dimly burning lamp she discerned the outline of a rude pallet, upon which was stretched the body of a lifeless woman with a dead infant lying on her breast.

CHAPTER X.

"Night will strew
On the damp grass myriads of lingering leaves,
And with them shall I die ; nor much it grieves,
To die, when summer dies on the cold sward."

WITH a terrible cry the girl fell on her knees beside the pallet, and flung her arms about the inanimate forms of mother and child.

A shiver ran through her at the contact of the babe's chill body, but in Muriel the spark of life still flickered, for as Mignon called upon her in a thousand wild and tender words of love and pity, two dark eyes opened slowly in the corpse-like face, and stared fixedly at her, with an awful mingling of horror, fear, and a something not far re-

moved in its expression from churlish unwelcome.

Feebly seeking to free herself from that close, importunate embrace, Muriel's head recoiled sideways on the pillow, and thus lying with half-averted face, she flung one wasted arm across her eyes, while with the other she clutched at, and drew upwards, the ragged sheet, as though to hide from her sister's eyes that which lay upon her breast. That averted face, that significant gesture . . . . they told Mignon all, and hope and she had done with each other for ever when she stooped and laid her lips against that thin and toil-worn hand.

Hope was dead, but love remained: love that could be turned aside by no shame or sin in the creature beloved, and that dumbly expressed itself in the passionate strength with which the girl's arms closed once more about that unresponsive, silent form.

"Muriel! my love, my darling!" cried Mignon in a voice of anguish, "look at me . . . . speak to me . . . . It is your little sister . . . . your Gabrielle . . . ."

Slowly, sullenly, Muriel drew from her eyes the arm that shielded them, and, still with that hard look of unwelcome in her eyes, said:

"You can kiss me . . . . You can put your arms about me . . . . Do you know what I am? A lost woman, an outcast . . . . a mother who is no wife . . . . A mother . . . . Dare I even claim that title? Bonald says, *N'en croyez pas les romans—il faut être épouse pour être mère . . . .*"

Appalled by her sister's words, her tone, Mignon drew back, trembling. Was this the sweet-voiced sister of her love, whose nature had been all gentle, and good, and tender?

"You should not have come," went on Muriel in that unfamiliar voice; "your coming gives me no joy, and adds but one more pang to my death-bed. It was my one prayer, my one desire, to die as I have lived—alone."

Her great hollow eyes strayed upwards to the blue patch of sky above her head, where shone those dazzling points of brightness, of which a little child once said that

"they were gimlet-holes made by God to let the glory through."

"Since I could not come back to you as I had promised—honest—I swore that I would never come back to you at all. From my place out in the cold and the darkness I have watched you in the sunlight, happy and innocent; and my one joy has been that you did not know, that you never would know, the truth."

"And you call that love?" said Mignon, with a very bitter cry. "Ah! had you longed for me as I for you, you would have heeded nothing; you would have come to me straight . . . . for how could the sin of a bad man turn my love from you, or make you any other to me than what you have ever been?"

"Think you I had no pride," cried Muriel, "that I would have mingled my ruined, smirched life with that happy, pure one upon the threshold of which you were standing? My sin and shame were my own, their shadow should never rest upon you, and since it is in the nature of all things to forget, I knew that time would heal the wound my

loss inflicted upon you. But now . . . . *now* I die, enduring the inconceivable misery of beholding you. You are acquainted, in all its wretched details, with the story of my degradation, and—for I know your heart—long after I am gone you will remember, and suffer . . . . suffer . . . ."

With the last words her voice had changed, had faltered, and now slow, painful tears rolled down her cheeks and fell on the hand that still held the sheet below her chin.

She lifted this hand, and held it before her eyes.

"Tears!" she said. "How long is it since my woes have been so light as to enable me to weep? When one's heart is breaking one does not weep, one prays; when it has broken, and God has hid His face from us, one neither weeps nor prays; one breathes, lives, *is* a curse. To the woman who lives, the hand of every man against her, save when to serve his own vile ends he offers her a tainted kindness; to struggle daily and hourly in the teeth of every obstacle to support the life that she desires only to see annihilated, with a memory

that not for one moment permits forgetfulness, but rather stings her through and through to intensest consciousness, think you so human, so easy, a relief as tears is permitted ?"

"It is all over now !" said Mignon wildly. "You will grow strong and well ; you will come away with me, and once together, we will forget the past . . . ."

"Well . . . . happy !" repeated Muriel ; the words leaving her lips with a strange intonation, as though unfamiliar alike to her ears and lips.

No need for Mignon to paint alluring pictures of the future, all the loud-voiced renunciation in the world could not preach so stern, so brief, so pitiful a homily as did the tone in which Muriel had uttered those two words. For her was no possibility of health of body or soul on this side the grave ; and something of this fact was borne in upon Mignon's mind as she looked upon her sister's face.

"And *he* . . . ." she exclaimed, involuntarily. "Is there a God in heaven that he goes his way unpunished while you are—thus ?"

"He lives," cried Muriel, every trace of

softness vanishing from her voice and manner, "absolutely indifferent to my fate, with heart, brain, soul, possessed by love of a woman, who, living or dying, has my deepest curse, my undying hatred, a woman but for whom, and her theft of that which was mine, I should be happy with you now, and to whom I owe all, all that in these past miserable months has befallen me. For every misery I have endured, every degradation through which I have passed, for every cruel pang of hunger and sting of cold that have assailed me, I thank her, and pray that even such may she endure a hundred-fold, and may her last end be even as mine!"

She paused, livid as the little shrouded face that lay on her breast, and utterly exhausted by the fearful energy with which she had uttered the above words.

"She may not have known," said Mignon, in a very low voice, and staring straight before her, "but *he* . . . . O! my God! *he* . . . . I have heard of such men, I have been told that such as he existed, but I did not believe it until now. . . ."

"It was not his fault," cried Muriel swiftly, and somehow, she could not have told why, Mignon knew then that whatever this man may have been, her sister had once, nay, still, loved him. "It was hers, she must have known his story, all the world knew it, and she should have scorned to steal him from a poor creature who had lost all for his sake . . . Any other lover would have done as well for her; there was only one man on earth who could enable me to retrieve *my* past . . . ."

"Do not blame *her*," said Mignon, her young stern face lifted as though in invocation of God's vengeance to heaven, "blame *him* . . . tell me his name. That I may seek him out, that I may bring him face to face with the ruin he has worked, that living and dying its memory may be a curse to prevent and follow him, that he may never know happiness with any woman living, but be shunned and abhorred by all who value honour and truth . . ."

But Muriel made no reply, a deathly pallor had spread over her wasted face, and as Mignon, believing her to be dying, chafed her cold hands, the door opened, and a middle-

aged man entered the garret, who looked scrutinisingly at the sick girl. He shook his head as he sat down beside her, then took that slender wrist in his hand, and shook his head for the second time.

"She will die?" exclaimed Mignon passionately. He had not thought so young a voice could express such depths of misery; he looked from the one sister's face to the other with a profound pity, perceiving that some tragedy was being played out here; then he rose and beckoned her to follow him.

Without the door, Mignon's question took another form of vehement appeal.

"She will live?" she cried.

"She may live till morning," he said reluctantly, "beyond that, I can encourage you to hope nothing."

Cowering beneath the surgeon's words, Mignon leant against the wall, her hands raised and pressing her ears, as though to shut out by sheer force the intelligence just conveyed to her.

The great bell of St. Paul's hard by rang out its solemn note; it had at intervals

sounded in her ears for the past hour, but now it seemed to fall on her heart with dull and dreadful meaning, to toll for the spirit so soon to set forth on its last awful journey alone!

She could not have told how or when the surgeon departed, only her senses seemed to come back to her when once more kneeling down by Muriel's side, she laid her arms about her neck. The real parting between the sisters was then, not later, and as their eyes met, all the stubborn pride and the fierceness died out of Muriel's, and the two poor creatures clung together in an embrace in which the bitterness of death strove to, yet could not, cast out all the sweetness of love.

Side by side their heads lay on the pillow, as they had so often lain in the days when, as little children, they had dwelt in love together, and, though in thought each was living over again the cruel years that they had been divided, no word was spoken between them, for heart spoke unto heart, and the mute language of eye, and lip, and body, told their own tale only too eloquently.

Yet was not the meed of their anguish

equal, for on the heart of the one already lay the numbing shadow of death, while that of the other, being vigorous with the pulses of life, was keen to suffer, strong to endure; and something of this, Muriel perhaps understood, as she laid her thin hand on her young sister's shining hair, and smoothed it from her brow.

"My little one . . . my heart . . ." she said tenderly, "and must we part so soon?"

"Take me with you," cried Mignon, passionately. "O! my love, my love, take me with you!"

"No," said Muriel; "you cannot come with me, little sister, and you would not, even if you could, for you have other ties, other hopes than these that have been blighted in me, and the love of a sister is not so deep and close as is the love of a husband."

Mignon covered her face with her hands, confounded, ashamed, stricken dumb with a sense of disloyalty that showed in the light of a crime, for, even as Muriel spoke, the moment of revelation had come, the moment that told her how, not in the sister here dying before her, was her life centred, but in one

whom, until now, she could not be said to have consciously loved.

She slipped to the ground and knelt there, her face hidden, but on her head Muriel's hand still moved gently to and fro. Did the poor hardened heart take an added bitterness at finding how, of no love on earth, not even that of her sister's in its entirety, did she die the possessor?

"I have seen him," said Muriel, after a short pause, "I have even heard his voice, and, myself hidden, watched his features, weighed his words, and I thank God that you are in hands so strong to protect and guard you as are his. And he being what he is, you do well to love him with your whole heart and soul, though were he false or bad, I would say, charm his fancy, delight his senses, but never give him that hold over you that your love, once irrevocably given, will afford to him!"

The bitterness had returned to her voice, the hardness to her eyes and lips; it was as one who thinks aloud that Mignon lifting her head exclaimed. "You loved—*him?*"

"Can you understand a love," said the dying woman, turning the restless fire of her dark eyes upon the white misery of her sister's face, "that tortures, embitters, shames the giver, that is so dark and harsh, and strange a potion to the receiver, that he turns from it with hatred and loathing? It was thus that I loved him when the first headlong passionate impulse of pity and tenderness that I had felt for him vanished, when I found that whereas he had been the one man the earth held for me, I had been but one out of many women to him, and that not out of love, but for the purpose of freeing himself from the wife he so hated, had he taken me away with him, and that though he meant to abide by the vow he had sworn to me, it would be from a sense of honour, not love, that he would fulfil it!"

Mignon started and looked around, as one who in a dream hearkens to the sound of words that she has with her actual ears heard but a short time before.

Surely she had heard this story somewhere, or one strangely like it . . . she tried

to remember where and when, but something seemed to hold her back, and prevent her.

"He came into my life like a storm-wind, in a moment he seemed to turn the dull sands of my life to gold, he swept me off my feet on the tide of his bold impetuous wooing, and for the sovereign charm that was in him, and for the great pity I bore him, and for that I was so young and inexperienced in the ways of men, I was undone, and never pausing to think, forgetful of my God, myself, all, my love for you being faint and chill (since there is not room for two human idols in one heart), when he beckoned to me, I went, and in the selfsame hour repented.

"A woman who gives all, leaves herself for ever a beggar, and henceforth, love as she will, her hand is empty of good to the man for whom she has stepped off her pedestal of purity.

"And so it came to pass that when the first girlish passion that so sweetly fed his vanity had passed, to be replaced by that bitter, tormenting love of which I have spoken, he

ceased to care for me, and even believed me to have wearied of him, as rapidly as he had done of me. I did not undeceive him, I scorned to pray for that which I could not win, and so we went from bad to worse, till our existence side by side daily became more and more unendurable, and neither dared to look ahead at the future we seemed doomed to drag out together. One joy in the future at least, I possessed; *he* could look forward to none. Mine was that once the period of waiting was past, and his vow to me redeemed, I should be free to go to you, my sister—rehabilitated. I was dwelling near you, I was eagerly anticipating the day, now not far distant, when I should be able to visit you not by stealth, but openly, when I made two discoveries.

"The first" . . . she shuddered, her eyes travelling downwards to that shrouded outline on her breast. "The second . . . that the man for whom I had yielded up all, the man who had sworn to make me his wife when he should be free, not only loved another woman, but had resolved to break that vow, since

thus, and thus alone, could he be happy with —*her*.

"Not all at once did this latter knowledge dawn upon me. The first warning came when I heard him murmuring over and over again in his sleep some woman's name, and the fashion of his uttering it convinced me that this was no passing caprice, but that he *loved* her. It was his custom to keep a diary, safely secured under lock and key, and to this, during his absence in town on the eve of his divorce suit, I found access, and beginning with a certain entry in May, I read straight through to the last line, written no longer ago than the night before.

"I saw myself condemned to everlasting shame. I saw the stranger snatching from me my last hope of redemption, and I lifted my brows to heaven, and called down God's heaviest curse upon this woman who cast me out to perdition, who sundered me for ever from the sister who, but an hour ago, had at length seemed to be within my grasp.

"Never pausing to think, only wishful to escape the degradation of the offer of money

that he would inevitably make, I left his house, and came to London, alone, penniless, my face, the beauty of which I loathed, since it had been so powerless to bind him to me, at once a source of help and danger. I obtained employment, I lost it; at every turn I found false friends and abundant enemies; my hand was against every man and woman, as their hands were against me, and by successive stages of poverty and misery I have come to —this.

"Yesternight I laid down the work upon which depended the morsel of bread that would keep body and soul together, for some instinct told me that my time of peril was nigh at hand, and I would see you if possible once more; so on foot I made my way to you, and, as though in answer to my prayer, you came to your bedroom-window, and looked out.

"I returned here at daybreak, and then . . . . and then . . . ." she shuddered, and looked downward, "this poor, blighted child of sin, prematurely born, saw the light . . . . It just breathed and died, and I bade them

lay it in my arms and leave us in peace, and that thus we might be buried together."

"And you were near me last night," cried Mignon. "You saw—you heard me . . . . you could turn away from the home that so long has waited for you, to endure your agony *alone* . . . ."

"To die would have been no such great thing," said Muriel faintly, her brow damp and chill with the dews of exhaustion; "more bitter to me than any approaching pang of death was the thought of your presence at my side, my sister . . . but now, thank God for this little space that we have had together, and, in the days to come, perhaps you will be able to forget all the sin and the shame, and think of Muriel as she . . . used to be . . ."

Her head fell back, the beautiful wan face took a greyer pallor, the dark eyes closed, she had slipped away into unconsciousness.

In vain Mignon cried, with every fond, foolish word of love her heart could fashion, upon her sister to speak, to awaken. Muriel lay quite still and silent: on brow and lip the foreshadowing of that peace which comes to

all in the hour of death. Presently the garret-door was pushed gently open, and the woman of the house entered. She came to the side of the bed, and stood, an uncouth and slovenly figure, looking down, with a shake of the head, and a sigh, at the dying girl.

"She'll not last till morning," she said, "and mayhap she'll be pleased to go, for 'tis a hard and wearifu' life she's lived, and an honest, all but for the sin o' one bad man; and I guess *that* won't be reckoned agin her up yon where she's goin' safe enough."

A tear rolled down her dirty, raddled cheek, then another and another; she wiped them away as though ashamed at displaying so much emotion, and added:

"Him as you come with, he's down below, and just wild to know how she is—and will she live or die?—and I'm to take him word, though I told him what the doctor said, and how there worn't nothing as even the Queen herself could do, if she wished it ever so, for the poor creature."

"*Him?*" repeated Mignon, staring at the woman with her miserable blue eyes. "I

don't know who you mean; but yes, yes . . . I remember . . . . Tell him . . . . tell him . . . ." (a sob rose in her throat and seemed to strangle her) "that she is *dying*. And go away," she added feverishly; "let me have her all to myself for the little time that is left to us. . . ."

A hoarse shout of tipsy laughter from some place below ascended the stairs, and came in at the open door. At sound of it, the woman, with one backward glance at Muriel, went quickly away.

The dying girl opened her eyes as the door closed.

"The man below—is your husband," she said, a burning blush covering her face, for a moment cheating Mignon's eye with the bright hues of returning health.

"My husband! No," said Mignon, colouring in her turn. "He does not know . . . . he is away in Scotland . . . . He who brought me (God bless him for it!) is one who has been a friend to both you and me, Muriel; indeed, but for him, my darling, I should not be with you now . . . ."

"And how came this stranger to know . . . that I was your sister?" said Muriel slowly. "How came he to know where to find me, hidden as I have been here?"

"I cannot tell," said Mignon sadly; "only I made him promise me once that if ever he should meet you he would come straight away and fetch me to you; he knew how I had been longing and *wearying* after you . . . ."

"Do you tell to all men the story of your sister's shame?" cried Muriel, with a passion beneath which her weak frame trembled.

"God forbid!" said Mignon swiftly. "So far as I could understand, he knew but little of you; and yet . . . and yet . . . he brought me here," she added thoughtfully.

"And his name?" said Muriel, "is it possible that out of all the world I have one friend?"

"His name is Philip La Mert," said Mignon gently; "and indeed he is your friend, as he has been mine always——"

She paused, terrified, for Muriel's weak hand had closed upon her arm with a clutch so strong, so unexpected, as to chill the very blood in her veins.

"You are mad!" said Muriel, "mad! Do you know what you are saying? *Philip La Mert!* You are mad! mad!"

She nipped the girl's arm close, flung it from her, laughing harshly the while, then cried:

"Who taught you to say that name so glibly, child? It is a pretty one, is it not? You are mad, I say, mad!" she muttered; "or did my ears play me a trick, and was it some other name you spoke?"

"But he is here," said Mignon, trembling. "Did you not hear what the woman said? how *anxious* he was about you, how miserable . . . ."

But Muriel only stared at the girl like a woman bewitched, then waving her back, cried:

"And you have let me tell you my wretched story when you . . . knew it already . . . . when you had made him promise that when he should have found me, he should *bring* you to me . . . ."

"He promised," said Mignon, "because . . because he was so sorry for me, and . . and for you . . . ."

"He is sorry for me," repeated Muriel below her breath, her haggard eyes uplifted to the stars; "and he is my friend . . . . my friend and yours . . . . Go to him," she cried, sitting suddenly erect, her right arm holding the dead child to her breast, "and say that '*Muriel would like to bid her friend, and her sister's friend, good-bye.*"

"You would see him?" said Mignon, withdrawing a step in her amazement, "*here?* . . . in this room . . ." Involuntarily her glance had fallen upon the dead child, and Muriel caught and interpreted her meaning.

"Ay! I will see him here," said Muriel, sternly, "and at once, or it will be too late. . . . Go! deliver the exact words I told you, and do not return without him. Unless cowardice be added to his other vices, he will obey my summons, as you will my command."

As Mignon still hesitated—shocked and amazed—scarcely believing the evidence of her ears, Muriel lifted her hand and pointed to the door, through which the girl slowly and unwillingly passed.

There was to Mignon, a profound indelicacy

in this summons of an almost stranger to her sister's chamber, and her cheek burnt as she descended the stairs, marvelling in what fashion she should convey this message with which she was charged.

Full as the miserable place had been of human beings when she ascended, it was more densely packed than ever now, but the noise of revelry below had ceased, and all seemed wrapped in slumber.

As that light footfall came down the stairs, a man who had sat for the past two hours at a dirty, beer-soddened table in a miserable room off the passage, lifted his head and looked up.

He knew that light step all too well, and that it was coming to him . . . . Pale as death, he rose up to meet her, and with lifted brows, but downcast eyes, stood awaiting the words of his condemnation. She had entered the room, she had approached, she actually stood before him, and still she did not speak; then, suspense being unendurable, he lifted his eyes, and dared to look at her.

She held a flaring candle in her hand that

shed its full light on her miserable young face, and on the fair hair that, tied at the back with a ribbon, fell loosely on her shoulders.

Nevertheless, not of her pale beauty, no, nor of her anguish, was Philip thinking, but that in her blue eyes shone as sweet and friendly a look as they had ever worn for him, nay, that as though in her trouble she turned to him as her friend, she put out her hand to his, and, with a pitiful little attempt at a smile, said:

"I have given you a great deal of trouble, have I not? But O! I am grateful . . . but for you I should never have seen my darling again . . . . She is asking for you," she said simply, yet with a great effort; "she sent me for you. I was to give you this message from her: '*Muriel would like to bid her friend, and her sister's friend, good-bye.*' Come!"

"She bade you tell me this," he repeated, catching his breath sharply as may a man who, having just escaped shipwreck, sees his bark about to founder within reach of land; "she has spoken of me to you, then?"

"I told her of how good you had been, how kind," said the girl. "But you must come at once, for she is dying fast, and the morning will soon be here . . . ."

Her voice ceased in a sob as she uttered the last words, and then he followed that lightly-flitting, girlish shape up, up, those many stairs until they came to the garret door, outside which Mignon paused with the handle in her hand as one whose heart fails at that which lies before it.

The great bell of St. Paul's clanged out the hour of four, and with the final stroke Philip La Mert had dumbly spoken his last farewell to the Mignon he had loved so well, and for whom he had so deeply sinned and suffered.

CHAPTER XI.

"A thousand knees,
Ten thousand years together, naked, fasting,
Upon a barren mountain and still winter,
In storm perpetual, could not make the gods
To look that way thou wert."

PHILIP, advancing, stopped abruptly, as one struck to the heart, and gazed straight before him. To all appearance already dead, Muriel lay on the miserable pallet; her child, no longer hidden, resting on her breast.

Upon that tiny wan face, with its anxious and premature look of care and suffering, his gaze remained riveted; then, as though it were a sight to be hidden from Mignon's eyes, he mechanically strove to interpose his body between her and it.

Probably he had never realised his sin until now that he saw it clothed in flesh before him, when in this small pitiful creature, made in his own image, he saw himself the transmitter of a curse that from generation to generation should fulfil itself, so that his transgression should never be wiped out, or banished off the face of the earth.

Neither could his conscience hitherto have been said to be awakened . . . for the effects of his sin, most of all in its influence on his fortunes with Mignon, he had indeed suffered, but of the naked sin itself he had seldom thought.

It has been finely said that "God punishes not by His caprices, but by His laws," and some glimmer of this great truth was perchance borne in on Philip's mind as he stood, forgetful even of Mignon, face to face with the fruit of his sin.

Slowly his eyes at last left the child, and travelled round the squalid, miserable room, that told its story of destitution and want all too plainly; then his glance reverted to the straw pallet, with its scanty clothing and patchwork quilt.

Mignon now drew near, and, kneeling down by her sister, laid her lips against the unconscious girl's cheek.

"Waken, my darling," she said; "he whom you bade me bring . . . . he is here . . . ."

Slowly, uncertainly, a hue of life crept back to Muriel's cheek and lips, her eyelids flickered, parted, and he knew that his hour had come.

He stood, his arms folded on his breast, and waited.

How long endured the pause that followed? To Philip the suffering of an eternity was crowded into those moments of waiting, and when at last her words came, they were received by him as the sentence of execution may be by the condemned man who has grown weary of waiting for death.

At sight of him a great tide of yearning love had for a moment swept across the dying woman's face, as though unconsciously she had stretched out her arms towards him; and could he have found but one word of truth or gentleness then for the poor creature who had

so sinned and suffered for him, she might have died at peace with him . . . . but alas! faithful to Mignon at Muriel's expense to the last, he saw neither look nor gesture. Conscious chiefly of his sin in the recoil it was about to have on the younger sister, he saw and suffered with her eyes and heart alone, while the tragedy of the other passed him by.

As he stood silent, impassive, instinct told Muriel that the influence of the stranger woman was still upon him, and roused to a jealous madness by the consciousness of her impotence to move him in death, even as in life, she cried bitterly:

"Lift your head, coward, perjurer, betrayer that you are, and look upon your handiwork, ay, print us well—my child and I—upon your memory, and then go back to *her*, and be happy with her if you can; forget us, if you are able!"

He lifted his head, looking not at her, but at Mignon, upon whose face had come a great fear, wonder, and expectation.

Muriel caught at the girl's arm and drew her forward.

"It was but now," she cried, "that you prayed me to tell you the name of my betrayer, that you might seek him out and drag him here, compelling him to look upon the ruin he had worked . . . . You need not go far to find him, for there he stands before you . . Your friend. O my God! . . *your friend*, Gabrielle, and mine!"

"*He?*" said Mignon, gazing at Philip with dilated eyes. "No, no . . . . it is not possible! . . . ."

But as she looked, something in his face arrested her attention—their eyes met. For one frightful moment she thought she was going mad; the next she was standing beside him, her white lips syllabling, yet refusing to utter the words,

"It is true?"

"*It is true.*"

She swayed slightly away from him, as one who is about to fall, then, as her lips moved, he fell down on his knees before her and burying his face in a portion of her robe, in a voice of agony, cried:

"Spare me, Mignon, spare me!"

A low cry followed his words, but it was uttered by the elder sister, not the younger, as lifting herself on her elbow, and desperately fighting against the mortal weakness that beset her,

"Who utters the name of Mignon here?" she cried fearfully, "that is *her* name . . . the name of the woman who stole my Philip from me . . . who cast me out to die a hundred deaths . . . whom I have cursed, whom I have hated . . . there is no Mignon here!"

But even as she spoke, slowly, slowly there dawned in her eyes an awful fear, doubt, and uncertainty; then, revelation coming to her even as it had come to her sister during the few past moments,

"You . . . *you* are Mignon?" she said in a whisper.

"Yes . . . I am Mignon . . ." said the girl in a voice that was like nothing human; "and you have cursed me . . . O my God! . . . you have cursed me . . . unsay that curse!" she cried deliriously, as she flung her arms about her sister's form, but Muriel,

thrusting away with all her feeble strength those beseeching hands, in a dread whirl of jealousy, horror, hatred, love, fell back upon the pillow—dead!

CHAPTER XII.

"God made him, therefore let him pass for a man; in truth, I know it is a sin to be a mocker."

SILENCE in the death-chamber for the space of five seconds; then with an awful cry Mignon flung herself upon her sister's body, crying to it for dear God's sake to give her one word, only one of pardon, of blessing . . of love. . .

But that agonised prayer fell upon deaf ears, and to all the girl's beseechings, that which had been Muriel opposed the grim silence that is the only true and veritable silence upon earth.

It is a silence that can be felt . . . it is a hideous void at which the ear aches, the heart rebels, against whose inexorable majesty we

dash ourselves, impotent as breakers against a wall, and woe, woe unto they who have not obtained their meed of forgiveness ere the everlasting darkness has descended, who have not wrested one parting word of love from the dying lips, and to whom must remain a lifelong hunger and despair!

For how long endured that wild and frenzied prayer from the living sister to the dead? Daylight was struggling uncertainly into the room when Mignon ceased her cries, and slipping to the floor, lay all huddled up together, like a creature who has been crushed and beaten out of all human shape.

Muriel had cursed her . . . . and Muriel was . . . . dead. God Himself could not reverse those two awful facts, and beneath them she sank down stunned, a creature one-half of whose brain was paralysed, and in whom memory and consciousness, save as affecting these points, were for the time being absent.

The sister of her love . . . . the sister for whom she had so patiently watched and waited, flesh of her flesh, blood of her blood, heart of

her heart . . . . had cursed her, had died with that curse unrevoked upon her lips, and across the bridge of silence, now yawning 'twixt them, no shriving word could ever cross, but for to-day, to-morrow, for ever, the woman who lived would have to rest under the shadow of that dreadful ban.

Muriel was dead . . . . O! never more would her coming be hearkened for by day or night, never more would her beautiful face come to Mignon in her dreams, with the glad light of love and welcome upon it; in wrath and bitterness had it passed away for ever, and never again, I wis, would it wear in the girl's memory the mien it so long had worn in her hopes . . . . Yet no instinct of rebellion stirred in her gentle heart as she looked up at the patch of grey sky overhead, and dumbly —endured.

Where was Muriel now? and had there fallen from her that earthly cloak of human passion, wrapped in which she had hurried into the presence of her Maker?

Surely in that new existence in which she was merged, all human hates and jealousies

were by now blotted out, love alone remaining for the weary wayfarers left behind?

In vain had Mignon addressed her prayers to the helpless clay beside her, but perhaps the disembodied spirit was somewhere at hand, and would hear, would forgive . . . .

"Muriel!" she said, in a low hoarse whisper, "are you anywhere near . . . will you not forgive . . . . *forgive* . . . . if you cannot speak to me, send me some sign that I may know and understand. . . ."

But there came no answer back to her, nor any sign that she craved, only some one who had heard that anguished pleading, yet of whose presence, until now, she had not been even conscious, drew near to her, and as one from whom speech is dragged by extremest, harshest necessity, uttered her name:

"*Mignon!*"

By any other name should he have called upon her rather than this . . . . it struck upon her ear with fatal significance, and revived that portion of the night's revelations that had hitherto been merged in the stupendous calamity so instantly following upon it.

Full recollection of the last time he had called her by that name, and the results, came to her as she slowly recoiled from him, in her blue eyes a great horror and loathing that grew, and grew, and beneath which he shrank and seemed to wither.

"And you dare to remain in *her* presence," she said, in a low intense whisper. "You dare to approach, to speak to me . . *you* . . if I had a knife in my hand I would stab you to the heart, and deem that I did righteously in ridding the earth of you . . . murderer, hypocrite, dastard! Is there a God above," she cried, lifting her terrible face to heaven, "that He permits such as you to live—such as her to die? And I have called you friend . . . . I have taken your hand in mine . . . ." she paused to look down shuddering, as though a stain must rest upon it; "I have talked to you of her, I have babbled to you of the happy days that she and I would have together, and all the time . . . . all the time, you knew yourself to be her betrayer . . . . that out in the world she was battling with hunger, cold, and shame . . . ."

She writhed to and fro, as one stung through and through by physical pain. It was as though she were tasting every misery through which her sister had passed. And he from whom the dead woman yonder had not wrung one glance of pity, in Mignon's every pang endured a hundred deaths.

"You have spoken to me of love. . . ." went on the girl. "O God! . . . . it makes my very flesh creep and crawl to think that I should have found favour in the eyes of such a thing as you . . . . that my ears have been polluted by words of love from such as you . . . . O, monstrous . . . . my sister's lover . . . . the father of my sister's child . . and I . . at one time I was in danger of falling to your hand . . . . I might have become your wife, and so supplanted her, taking the place that by every right of honour and justice was hers; but that I had one friend who took me to the shelter of his home . . . ."

With the last words her voice changed; into her face, all distorted by its great loathing and hatred, a more human expression

came. For the first time Philip dared to raise his head to look at her.

But as he gazed, that momentary gleam of softness died out, her voice was harsher, crueller even than before, as she cried:

"And so it was of *her* you were speaking when in the garden at Rosemary you bade me remember in the days to come how you loved me, in spite of your conscience, your God, all . . . . It was with that black treachery at your heart to *her* that you came to me with the foulest love-suit a man ever prosecuted; it was with the knowledge that your success with me meant worse than death to that poor trusting creature, that you prayed me to become your wife . . . . *your* wife . . . ."

The deadly detestation with which she breathed those two words seemed to rouse Philip as with a blow.

"And did I not love you?" he cried wildly; "has not the greater part of my sin been committed solely and entirely for the sake of the great love I bore to you?"

"Can such as you *love?*" she said, her gaze

full of scorn. "O! do not so take that sacred name in vain, or I would pray that it should never find place in my heart . . . . that I might live and die knowing naught but the hatred and loathing of which it is now so full!"

"Hatred?" he repeated, trembling as the sinner may who has long expected his doom, yet cannot but wince as he hears it pronounced; "yet though love can turn to hate so swiftly, may not the memory of love tarry with us for awhile? By the love you so lately bore me, I beseech you to have mercy, mercy, and not utterly crush to earth him who is already so heavily punished of God!"

"By the love I bore you?" repeated Mignon, staring at him with eyes sexless, incredulous as those of a child. "*I* . . . . love *you?* . . . . In the days that I liked you best, even when I was so drawn towards you by the belief that you could give me news of my darling . . . . there was never one thought, one throb of love for you in my heart . . . ."

"When I walked with you," said Philip, gazing at her as a man who slowly awakens

from a dream, "when, as plainly as looks could speak, you told me why you had removed your wedding-ring . . how your heart had awakened at last, and for me . . . ."

"For you?" she said below her breath. "O! not for you . . . . not for you . . . ."

Her rigid face changed, her bent brows relaxed, in her blue eyes a tender light shone, an exquisite blush mantled slowly on her cheek, and spread gradually over her face.

"You love Adam!" cried Philip involuntarily.

"That is between him . . . and me . . ." she said below her breath, then, turning back to her sister, she flung herself on her knees by the pallet, crying:

"Oh! my heart . . . my heart . . . and can I talk of love, or life, or hope, while you lie *thus?*"

"You have never loved me," said Philip slowly; "never . . . never . . . and you love . . . *him.*"

He approached the bed, and looked down, not on Mignon, but on Muriel, upon whose

beautiful face the bitterness of life had passed away, to be replaced by that peace that passeth all understanding.

Slowly, fearfully he lifted her wan hand, the hand upon which a ring should have been, but was not, slowly he laid it down again. This poor creature had loved him once, had sinned, had suffered for him, and he had loved her not, while that other whom he had loved to his own undoing, had cast his passion aside as a thing of naught, had mocked, derided, denied it.

"*She* would have forgiven me," he said very low; "broken, wretched, dying as she was, she would have found some word of pardon, of love, for me, had I prayed for it, but you . . . you, who stand on the threshold of a happy existence, upon whose conscience no load of sin or shame rests, who have the haven of a husband's love to which to creep . . . and the long years of the future in which to forget, you withhold from me, miserable wretch, the one word for which I crave . . . 'he that cannot forgive breaks the bridge over which he must pass himself,

for every man hath need of forgiveness . . .' Have you never heard or read some such words as these ?"

For a moment those grandly merciful words knocked at, and sought an entrance at the girl's heart; for one moment she wavered, then as her eyes fell on the dead, so wronged, so mute, so pitiful, her face hardened, unconsciously echoing the old Queen's words:

"God may forgive you," she said, "but I never will !"

Then he turned and went away, leaving her alone with her dead.

CHAPTER XIII.

"He marked their brows and foreheads; saw their hair
Put sleekly on one side with nicest care:
And each one's gentle wrists, with reverence,
Put crosswise to its heart."

THE last offices of the dead had been performed, and, folded in spotless white, lay the young mother and child.

No flower was in either hand, though an hour ago the woman of the house had entered the attic, bearing a great basket of snowy blossoms and waxen green leaves; but Mignon, knowing by whose hand they were sent, shuddering, had bade her take them away; .... no flower purchased by *his* gold should lie upon her darling's breast.

And the woman had gone away with uplifted shoulders and brows, asking herself, did the girl think that dead folks buried themselves, and whom did she suppose was making arrangements for, and paying, the expenses of her sister's funeral? And surely, if a substantial favour like that could be accepted at his hands, folks might bear to stomach a simple gift of flowers?

She had made a pretty shrewd guess at the story of the dead woman, and the relation borne to her by Philip, but Mignon's ways puzzled and confounded her.

Not one thought did the girl seem to give to those stern, inevitable details of death that usually fall so heavily on the mourner. Dimly she knew that soon her sister would be taken from her, therefore she clung to, and would not leave her during those long three days and nights that elapsed between the death and burial.

With Muriel's curse ever ringing in her ears, with the awful knowledge of her sister's past lying like a stone at her heart, she kept her lonely vigil, dumb, half-crazed, and drank

the bitter cup held to her lips unto the dregs.

Had she not possessed a source of hope of which she scarcely dared to think, yet that was ever present to her mind, had she known no refuge to which to creep when once the fury of this agony should be overpast, she would certainly have lost her wits then, not later, for assuredly it was a woman more than half mad who, on the morning of the funeral, flung herself across the coffin, and refused to allow the men to carry that light burden away.

Then, all cries, prayers, tears, being unavailing, she had looked her last on that poor dead face, and following that hideous velvet pall down those many, many stairs, later on was standing by the side of an open grave, hearkening to a voice that from a great distance off, uttered the words, "Ashes to ashes . . . dust to dust" . . . and then there had fallen a crash of earth on Muriel's heart, or so she thought . . . and with a great cry she had fallen down . . . down . . . anon awakening, to find herself in the miserable garret, stretched on the pallet

that but a few hours ago was pressed by Muriel's dead body.

She sat up, put her feet to the ground, thrust the hair from her eyes, and looked around—she was alone.

As half-conscious she still gazed around her, the door was thrown back, and Philip entered. Entered! rather did he reel as he walked like a drunken man, yet the fumes of wine were not in his brain, but rather a disease that had struck him down that morning, that he still struggled against and resisted until such time as he should have made one last, one desperate effort to obtain Mignon's forgiveness.

"Mignon!" he cried wildly, "Mignon! have you no mercy, *no* pity for a wretch so forsaken of God and man as I? I cannot die without your forgiveness . . . . and death is fast overtaking me . . . . Before it is too late, I beseech you to speak one word, one little word of pardon . . . ."

"Had you any pity upon *her?*" cried the girl, trembling in every limb. "Can your repentance bring her back again, or my

forgiveness make you any other than the murderer that you are? Go to Him"—she pointed upwards—"but do not come to me . . . . Perhaps before I die, I may forgive; but not now . . . not now . . . ."

The poor wretch had clutched at her dress; she drew it out of his grasp as though that touch were contamination, and as she did so, he fell forward and lay across the foot of the pallet.

For a moment, a faint pity struggled into Mignon's face, then, with a gesture of disgust, she turned from him, and stooping her lips to the pillow Muriel's head had pressed, she threw a last look round the wretched room, and passed down the staircase out into the busy streets.

* * * * *

Through the brain-fever, long threatened, that at last had overtaken Philip, he was tended not unkindly by the woman of the house. In his pocket-book she found money enough and to spare for all expenses, and being no robber, but fairly honest according to her lights, she procured him such advice

and nursing as he needed, and left the matter in the hands of Providence. Providence elected to turn the scale in the favour of life, yet with so niggard a hand that scarcely could the man, who at the end of two months rose from his bed, be said to be saved, but rather that his span of life had been for a very short period extended.

His first act had been to visit Muriel's grave, and he had pondered over the violets strown upon it, marvelling whether her sister's hand had laid them there; nay, on that self-same night some strange influence had seemed to beckon him thither, as it had beckoned Mignon . . . . Mignon, whom he believed to be safe in her husband's care, and of whom he had been thinking as one who, in the sweets of her new-found love, was already learning to forget the miserable story of the past.

So he had thought . . he had dreamt of her . . and the poor distraught outcast sleeping in the moonlight was the reality of his dream.

Would death come to him before he had restored her to her husband, before the story that she was powerless to utter had been

uttered by the only other person living able to speak it? This was the question that each morning he asked himself when he rose; that was as far as ever from being answered when night came, and he laid himself down to seek the rest that for ever was denied to him.

CHAPTER XIV.

"A great and important passion is a great means of wisdom."

A BLUSTERING January wind that might have been a March one, and carried a foretaste of spring in its vigorous breath, tore and frolicked and swept on its way, sending hats flying, clothes whirling, apple-stalls to the right about, and with his rude salute even brought a tinge of colour to the cheek of a poorly-clad girl who stood at the corner of Chancery Lane, with a number of bunches of violets in her hand.

At a little distance stood a middle-aged woman, who watched her, and seemed to be waiting until her mind should be made up.

While the girl hesitated, as one perplexed, and undecided in which direction to proceed, a man, who towered head and shoulders above the crowd, emerged from beneath Temple Bar, and came slowly towards her.

She saw him and she shrank back, trembling violently, fear, joy, love, rapidly succeeding themselves upon her countenance, then, as he approached, was passing her, apparently obeying a desperate and uncontrollable impulse, she darted forward, and struggling to speak, stood in his path, with both hands clasped and uplifted. The woman too had uttered a low quick cry, and turned pale, as one who fears. His thoughts were miles away, his eyes took no heed of the faces about him, nevertheless, attracted perhaps by their perfume, he glanced downwards at the cluster of violets held, as he thought, towards him, then, still absently, stopped, took out a penny, and held it out to what he supposed to be the flower-girl.

For a moment a wan face was lifted to his, for a moment a pair of blue eyes met his own, then she drew back, covering that miserable

face with a corner of her cloak; and Adam, restoring the penny to his pocket, went on his way.

On his way, yet with a strangely unquiet heart, with throbbing pulses—and why, forsooth? Because a poor, ragged little flower-girl had blue eyes—like hers—because the shape of a pair of pale lips reminded him of a lovely pair of rosy ones that had once been his; because the breath of the violets had brought to his memory the girl who loved all flowers almost as dearly as he loved them himself.

A pair of blue eyes . . . . Was he never to see a bit of blue sky, or a child's blonde head without the eyes and hair of the woman he had once loved appearing before him?

He had rooted her out of his heart, he loved her no longer, yet he had not power to efface her image from his mind; a chance look, a resemblance, would bring her back, and there would follow a period of unrest and fever that he ascribed to his craving for vengeance on Philip, to his disheartening and fruitless search; to anything, in short, but

the real and true cause—viz., his profound and ineradicable love for her.

True love is like the small-pox or typhoid fever: once be thoroughly impregnated with either disease, and it will be as impossible to take it in the same degree a second time as it will be difficult to eradicate the effects of it from the system. Thus may a man with the seeds of death within him walk bravely erect, and cheat himself with the belief that he is strong and well, until one day that deceitful strength fails him, and too late he realises the vanity of his fancied security.

What ailed him that day, Adam asked himself, as he turned into the precincts of the Temple, that he should be so thoroughly possessed by the thought of her, that he should even have a bodily sense as of her presence near him? That, look which way he would, he saw nothing but her face, her eyes, while, mingling subtly with his thoughts, came the perfume of a cluster of violets?

He entered a house in one of the courts, and climbed the many stairs that led to the modest chambers that he called his own.

His name, nevertheless, did not appear among that long list of legal gentlemen below. He had no fear of being surprised by his father or any other person to whom was known the story of his disgrace, and here, in the intervals of that apparently useless search of which he had long wearied, he found among his books some portion of that forgetfulness that he had so sternly sworn to himself to compass.

And yet, as he seated himself in his accustomed place, and drew towards him one of the volumes that he had been studying far into the preceding night, the letters on the page played strange tricks with his eyes, and spelt out over and over again the name of Mignon.

Those violets! Their scent seemed to pursue him everywhere, he could have sworn there were some in the room, he was bewitched . . . . dreaming . . . . and then he became aware of a slender current of air that streamed through the gradually-opening door, and in the widening aperture he saw—a great bunch of the flowers of which he was thinking.

It had been no fancy, he had actually smelled them, and he smiled at his own imagination, curiously wondering what was going to happen next, as he sat, his eyes fixed upon the door, and waited.

By slow degrees a shabby, slight shape emerged into view, he recognised it for that of the flower-girl, who had first offered him her wares, then refused his penny, and he said to himself that she had repented of that refusal, and followed him all the way for it, even up those many stairs that might well have deterred her.

He wished that she had not come . . . it was the sight of her that had put Mignon into his thoughts . . . he would give her, not a penny, but a shining bit of silver, and then she would go away gladly enough, and leave him to his work. But she should leave no violets with him, since in some indescribable fashion they suggested *her*.

He held the money out towards her, saying:

"I do not want your flowers, my girl, but since you have come so far——"

He stopped abruptly, a consciousness of

something strange, *unusual*, stealing over him, as the girl advanced towards him indeed, but extended no hand to take the proffered coin.

Nearer she came, nearer yet, until she stood beside him, then, laying her hand upon his, flowers and all, she looked into his face.

May not that be described as a moment of madness in which a man's mind fails to grasp, to comprehend, some simple fact that lies before him? To Adam the face into which he looked was the face of a stranger, a stranger, who yet bore a likeness to the woman that he had loved, a faded, pale, and caricatured likeness, that was all; for were she placed by the side of the real Mignon, there would probably be little or no real resemblance between them.

He looked down at the hand lying upon his own; it was a slender hand, apparently unused to hard work, by no means what one would expect to belong to a poor flower-girl who toiled for her bread honestly, a hand that he seemed to know.

"Douglas . . ." it was his name . . .

the name by which no one save his mother had ever addressed him . . . and the voice was . . . Mignon's . . . eyes and voice alike were hers, yet *this* was not . . . Mignon . . .

Turning slowly, he looked again into her face, looked and literally did not know it. The memory of her as she had been, stepped between him and the image of her as she was. He told himself he was mad, dreaming, an excited imagination, imbued with the thought of her, had conjured up the phantom likeness, his mind was diseased, and, like the slayer, who in every face sees but the features of his victim, so in everything to-day he saw but the reflection of hers.

He shivered, drew his hand away from beneath hers, then once again he held out the coin, not looking at the girl, but straight before him.

"You should not have followed me here," he said harshly; "take this, and go!" and he pointed imperatively to the door.

That harsh voice, that peremptory gesture of dismissal, conveyed their meaning with

cruel clearness to the poor creature's brain; she cowered as though beneath a blow, and for a moment seemed about to obey him; then she flung herself on her knees beside him.

"Douglas . . ." she said in a voice of heart-breaking agony. "*Douglas* . . ." and it was strange that the name by which she had learned to love him should never pass her lips until reason had abandoned its guard over them, "it is your Mignon . . . your poor little Mignon . . ."

He sat as though turned to stone, and looked at her.

Even then he refused to realise the truth, but gazed at her as a man may at a mask behind which he seeks to pierce to the familiar features that he is told are behind it.

Yes, the eyes, the lips, were Mignon's, but the face was strange to him; he had never seen it before—it was a chance resemblance . . . . and how came *his* name to be uttered by this poor outcast?

Nevertheless, even while he thus assured himself, that consciousness within us that argues not, but simply *is*, told him the truth.

He *would* not realise it, he thrust it from him, as rising, and still strictly keeping to that obstinate decision arrived at by him, he said:

"Do you hear me? Go!"

She lifted both hands, wildly pressing them against her brows, and as she did so, her miserable hat fell upon her shoulders, exposing the little blonde head that he knew so well.

Probably he believed that it was then only that he recognised her; yet I think the first shock of revelation was over, when, drawing back a step, he said:

"And what do you do—here?"

Comprehending no more of his words than that they were pitiless ones, she sought not to reply, only with lips parted in what might well be mistaken for the quiver and agony of guilt, seemed to await his next words.

He was regarding her, as one who looks at, yet beyond her, in his eyes the look of him who gazes upon some loathsome sight, some foul creation, against the horror of which his flesh creeps, his soul recoils; and indeed

he was then regarding, not her, but that leprosy of sin in which, for the first time in the flesh, she stood clothed before him. Not as the Mignon of his manhood's dream, but as the smirched, spoilt toy of a man's idle caprice, did he behold her; and once again he experienced that burning intolerable shame which had beset him during that night's vigil at Rosemary.

How thick and beautiful her hair still was —the hair with which her lover's hands had doubtless often played . . . . how beautiful the shape of the pale lips that he had doubtless so often kissed . . . . lastly, he found himself wondering by what strange lack of moral consciousness she had contrived to retain that innocent look which still lay upon her?

It had been his one great fear that she would seek him out, perchance with some wild prayer for forgiveness, perchance because, when deprived of the love for which she had lost all, she would (as women, and not the best, have been known to do) yearn for some crumb of that which she had formerly slighted.

Well, he had feared truly: she had found him out, and if the one word uttered by her meant anything, it meant that she had yet some hope, some desire, of reinstating herself in his heart.

That she had fallen to extremest penury he could not doubt, although why this should be was hard to tell, unless it were that she had been deserted by Philip, and then, with a sharp, sudden pang, he remembered that she had offered him a bunch of violets .... nay, that she was standing at a street corner apparently selling them for a living .... and was that strange look in her face that so perplexed him caused by—privation?

"Why do you not go back to Rosemary?" he said in measured tones; "it is a shelter that has long awaited you, and Prue still watches for, and awaits your coming—"

She gathered none of the sense of his words, only looked up into that face, stern and inexorable as fate, then, like a loving, chidden child who evades mention of the fault for which it has but now been punished, yet seeks to make its peace by submission and a caress,

she lifted both hands pleadingly towards him, and "Violets! sweet violets!" she said,

> "All a-blowing,
> And a-growing!"

then smiled, the piteous, pathetic, vacant smile of the mad . . . and Adam, with a sudden, awful conviction of the truth, for the first time understood why her face had seemed to him as the face of a stranger.

CHAPTER XV.

"Nothing in his life
Became him like the leaving of it."

ADAM stood transfixed. All the loathing detestation of her sin, all the bodily sickening at his own shame that her presence had hitherto induced in him, swept away in a great torrent of love and pity, beneath which he trembled like a reed. Those pleading, outstretched hands . . . that lost, pathetic smile, that pitiful attitude, which in its confiding helplessness appealed to every fibre of his manliness and strength, drove from him the consciousness of her fault, leaving him for the moment alive only to the awful punishment and consequences of it. What dread tale, that she had not power to

speak, was locked within those poor and trembling lips? What experience of cruelty and desertion had driven her out, all astray, defenceless, at the mercy of man as she was, to support herself by selling violets in the open streets of London?

A knot rose in his throat . . . . his eyes were dim as he stooped, and lifting that little kneeling figure, drew her into the chair whence he had but now risen, growing pale as death at the momentary contact of his flesh with hers.

He covered his face with his hands . . . . but though his eyes were veiled, he saw her . . . . ay, saw her as the poor mindless, broken thing that she was, and, with a dual consciousness, at the same moment beheld her as she had once been . . . . as the song of joy and beauty that she had once been—a girl whose laugh was music, whose glance a sunbeam, and to whom all bright and airy graces had been natural as the air she breathed . . . . He drew his hand fiercely from before his eyes, and looked at the squalid dress, the faded, pinched face,

and asked himself again, were they caused—O merciful God!—by *famine?*

As one goaded to madness by an intolerable thought, he went away, returning almost instantly with food, which he set before her, for one dreadful moment scarcely daring to breathe as she half stretched her hand towards it, then shook her head and resumed her anxious watch of his face.

He was saying to himself that yon girl was his wife . . . . that yon was the creature whom he had vowed to watch over, to protect and cherish, who yet bore his name, the name of which he was so silently yet deeply proud . . . . and that such as she now was she had become through Philip La Mert.

Philip La Mert's work . . . . as he looked at it, the lust for vengeance upon the betrayer that had hitherto possessed him, counted as nothing in comparison with the madness that overcame him then, and as he advanced a step, in imagination precipitating himself upon his enemy, his form swelling to almost superhuman grandeur, his eyes flashing fire, his right hand clenched, and crushing

to pulp the violets he had but now taken from Mignon, the girl cowered and shrank away from him in fear.

The next moment, so speedily had Prue found Philip, after tracking Adam (and Mignon) to his home, the door opened, and for the second time that morning an unexpected visitor stood on the threshold. The man for vengeance upon whom Adam hungered, body and soul, entering hurriedly, came face to face with him.

"Thank God!" he cried, a great light of joy spreading over his ashen face, "that she is here—that she is with you. Half my task now, and that the hardest half, is done!"

"Dog!" cried Adam, "and do we meet at last?"

But even as he spoke, the sudden, awful conviction came home to him that his enemy had escaped him. That out of his hands had been taken the punishment for which he thirsted, for that before the tribunal, not of man, but of God, would Philip La Mert, before many hours were past, be standing to give account of his evil deeds.

His enemy had escaped him! The thought of Mignon even was blotted out in that awful sense of frustrated vengeance, as with clenched hand falling nerveless at his side, his whole attitude breathing strength, justice, and sublime wrath, he towered above that other, who, wan, bowed, and grey, bore upon his forehead that death-sign which the most ignorant could not have failed to comprehend. Covering his face with his hands Adam drew back . . . *this* . . . this was the thing with which he had so prayed to measure his strength . . . *this*, that had less than a woman's strength in its fevered, broken frame . . . .

Mignon was gazing from one to the other, painfully trying to understand. . . . Without, a woman's form leaned against the lintel of the door, with fear and trembling awaiting the result of the meeting between the two men.

"Look at her," said Adam, lifting his hand and pointing to Mignon; "look at your handiwork, I say, and rejoice. 'But half your task was done,' you said; it would puzzle even you to work aught more deadly

on yon broken, mindless thing, than you have worked already!"

Philip's eyes turned towards that slight and sordid figure; he shuddered, yet not as one to whom the sight is a new one.

"Look well at her," cried Adam in his terrible voice, the voice that was the only outlet to the fury of baffled vengeance that swayed him; "you best know what she was ere your cursed sin blighted her; look at her as she *is*, at a sight that, were there justice in heaven, should strike you blind in the beholding!"

Still no reply, still that desperate struggle for breath, that hand pressed hard against the side, that mien as of utter guilt and dejection.

"You swore to me," cried Adam, "as between man and man, that she should be sacred to you as your own sister might be, that never would you by word or deed bring discredit on her, or your love for her; and when my back was turned, and with the foulest heart, the most perjured lips that ever traitor wore, you bided your opportunity, you stole her away, you made of her

that which she now stands—a thing of shame, of sin, of degradation; and now, *now* you dare to pursue her even into my presence, a presence to which she has fled, with God knows what story of desertion and outrage, that she cannot speak. Go!" (there came into his voice the leap, the fury of a wild beast who springs upon his prey) "ere I forget my manhood and your weakness—go! nor dare farther to molest yon poor outcast, that, though by the right of sin, is yours, shall no longer be the sport of your brutality, but henceforth be cared for and tended as her helpless state demands."

"Mine?" said Philip, lifting his head at last. "Oh! were it mine, poor though it be, I were indeed rich; but mine it is not, no, nor ever will be . . . . as it has always been, so is it now—your own."

"Do you dare to mock me?" cried Adam, striding forward, the veins standing out on his forehead like cords, blood springing from the palms into which his nails had dug. "What! that which once was yours, and now is by you cast aside, you dare to call *mine?*"

"It never was mine," said Philip, his face bathed in the dews of utter exhaustion, "neither in name nor in body, in heart or in fancy, has she for one moment belonged to any man but you, nay, her very mind was in your keeping, and when she deemed that your love had failed her, that you believed her to have betrayed you, that mind went, and she became what you see her now."

"You are mad!" said Adam, trembling violently, "mad, I say!"

He dashed his hand across his brow.

"Does a woman who loves her husband forsake him for another man? O! it is a fine tale" (he laughed long and harshly), "and one that does you credit, since you know that *she* is not able to speak and disprove it, and the lie that a man tells to shield the honour of a woman who has sinned for him is doubtless a noble one; nevertheless" (there came an ominous gleam into his eyes) "if you are wise, you will spare it me."

"She came away to her sister," said Philip, "to her sister who was dying—murdered by *me* . . . . Long ere she knew the name of

Muriel's betrayer, in the days when she believed me to be Muriel's friend (and in this lay the whole secret of her apparent preference for me) she had wrung from me a promise that if ever I chanced upon Muriel I would go straight to her, whether it were by day or night, and fetch her to that sister's side; and I kept my vow, at what cost to myself no one will ever know . . . ever know."

He paused, struggling with his mortal weakness, and in that pause Mignon timidly crept a step nearer to Adam and looked up into his face. But as one stricken with a sore and terrible shame her husband stood, and groaning aloud, hid his face from her.

She was pure! . . . she was innocent, after all. Phillis had been right, while *he* . . .

"Of the words of hatred and loathing that she spoke to me by her sister's corpse, when she knew me for what I was," went on Philip, "I will not speak . . . in my heart I bear them always, leaden curses to weigh my soul down to hell! only believe that under heaven there crawls no thing so vile in her eyes as I."

"But she loved you once," cried Adam, "before she knew the story of her sister. . . . It was the knowledge of *that* which broke her love?"

"She never loved me," said Philip, "never . . . . never . . . . That was the last, the most miserable mistake of the fatal series; for, madman, coxcomb that I was, I once believed that her love was mine . . . . that the heart which I saw day by day awakening for you was for me. . . . . O! my God!" he cried, "*how* she undeceived me! . . . Do not dream that I have soiled her ears with one word that could pollute them; my vow to you I have kept to the letter, even in the teeth of my mistaken, miserable belief. . . . Pure as she was on the day you first beheld her, so pure is she now, and her madness will not endure . . . . . with love's healing influence at work, it will pass . . . . and you will be happy . . . . happy . . . ."

He had fallen rather than thrown himself into a chair, and now his head sank slowly, slowly forward, until it lay on his outstretched arms and rested there.

If only she would speak to him the one word of forgiveness for which he had so wildly and often prayed . . . if only he had strength to raise his head, to call to her. . . . Surely, surely she would forgive him now? . . .

"*Mignon!*"

Who uttered that rapt, delirious cry? Not Philip. . . . Looking up through the dimness of death, he saw those two standing face to face, saw the lover hold out arms to which the girl crept with a long, long, sobbing sigh, as one who finds herself at home after long wandering; then a great darkness came down on *one* present, a great silence settled slowly about him . . . . and Philip's soul had sailed out alone upon the great sea of eternity to meet his Maker.

THE END.

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